FORMAN.

A TALE.

VOL. III.

J. MOYES, GREVILLE STREET, LONDON.

FORMAN.

A TALE.

"———— Hast thou as yet conferr'd
"With Margery Jourdain, the cunning witch;
"And Roger Bolingbroke, the conjuror?"

Henry VI. Part II.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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FORMAN.

CHAPTER I.

Meanwhile a similar discovery to that of the Earl of Nortonborough, which we last recounted, had been made by others; and the tumult soon reached Mondomer, whose hole of a sleeping place was on the farther side of the court.

He did every thing that prudence and activity suggested upon the subject; but with little success, as may readily be conceived. One or two sarcasms he could not repress upon being informed of Lord Nortonborough's notable arrangement about the guard; particularly as the omission to acquaint him with such proceedings, transacted in his absence, struck our hero as mean and unfair dealing.

Indeed, at first, he was at a loss how to account for the measure at all; till it became so evident that the poor crest-fallen earl had been really imposed upon by complaints of sickness, that Hugh felt no inclination to vex him farther. In this compassionate disposition he was confirmed by Lord Alfreton's story; at whom he shook his head, and observed, with a laugh, "You are a much better hand, Alfreton, at apprehending a robber than keeping him when you have got him: but we may as well say no more about it; for Nortonborough would certainly endeavour to ride off upon your remissness."

The poor earl's vexations and inconveniences indeed now almost amounted to a pitiable distress. Left without a single attendant, cheated, and miserably disappointed as to all that had been, and was to be, divulged to him; and all chance of recovering the valuable property which seemed within his grasp, either vanished for ever, or at least postponed to a very distant day. Not to mention that the sheriff, with a strong party, was hourly ex-

pected from Derby in quest of the prisoner; to whom the peer had no story to tell at all calculated to advance him in that magistrate's opinion. All these mortifications, however, must be endured, and were so; and as nothing now remained at his present sojourn soliciting his lordship to indulge in any longer stay, he departed with the sheriff for Derby, who paid that respect to his rank which it is probable he might have denied to his merit, and gave Nortonborough every accommodation till his own people could be summoned about him at that city. Our young friends cared but little for the robber's escape, followed so speedily as it was by their deliverance from the Lord Nortonborough; and Lionel improving hourly in strength, they passed two quiet and agreeable days by themselves, which ended with the morning of October the sixth. While Hugh was at his breakfast, for Alfreton did not yet rise to that meal, a letter was brought to the former by the messenger whom he had despatched into Cheshire: it was dated

from Lord Nantwich's seat, and couched in these terms: —

"My dear Lord!

"My father, &c. not having yet returned to England, and not intending, I believe, to come down here when they do return, I opened your letter of course, when I heard from the fellow who bore it what it was about. Poor Lionel! Upon my faith, he's had a very narrow escape, if he has escaped; of which you give one considerable hopes, though. How you two should be travelling together, is what I can't in the least make out: I'd no conception you were acquainted. However, I assure your lordship I was uncommonly cut down by receiving such bad news. When one's going to lose a near relation, one feels so different about him from any thing one has ever done before, that, although Lionel and I no more suit than salt and honey; and though, speaking in a worldly view, his death would be such a thing for me — I was as low and melancholy, as the very devil himself: I was, if you'll believe me. First of all, I determined to set out that instant; but as your lordship thought favourably of my brother's state, and mentioned, besides, how that

beast, Lord Nortonborough, was now with you, who I know very well, though he might be glad to see me there, would never speak to one the more at Whitehall or St. James's; I thought I might as well write by your messenger, but shan't be long in arriving after this comes to your hands. I only wait till Nortonborough's likely to be fairly off the premises—a hound! Pretty baddish quarters, I take it for granted; but I'm not the sort of fellow to make a fuss about them, if I find Lionel likely to live. Pray remember me kindly to him; and remain,

"My dear lord,
'Your most humble servitor,
"Edward Alfreton."

Edward proved as good as his word, in regard to following the letter with due expedition; for on the same day that Lord Mondomer received it, the former had advanced as far as Longnor, in Staffordshire, upon his way to the Crown and Thistle. There he heard a piece of news, which, on the whole, did not tend to displease him; and full of this information, but languishing for somebody to talk it over with (for he was unaccompanied

even by a servant), he had just crossed the border of Derbyshire, when, to his extreme joy, he observed Sir George Stanley riding that way; whom he was the less surprised to see, being aware that the baronet was to be thereabouts at the beginning of October.

"How goes it, Sir George?" cried Edward. "How long have you been in this part of the world? Did you leave the fair lady at home?"

"Alice is impounded," returned the other, with old dame Peplor, at Hartington, hard by. We've been with the Broomes since — Ah! not long. I know where you're going well enough; but the world's turned upside down here, my boy. Have you heard the news?"

"I rather believe I have," said Edward, with a shout of laughter.

"Faith," quoth the baronet, "if you knew how folks in these parts talk about it, you'd think 'twas no laughing matter."

"Oh, baronet, baronet!" returned Edward; I believe 'twill be the death of me. Maltravers! of all the fellows on the face of the earth, to

be guarded by my brother and young Mondomer!"

"Nay," said Sir George, "your brother was in bed with his wound."

"Well, never mind; Hugh Mondomer and my Lord Nortonborough then! There are your gaolers! there are your lynxes! there are your Cerberuses! Come, you were riding my way."

"No, I wasn't, upon my life."

"Nonsense," cried the other, "one way's just the same as another to you, provided you get back by dinner. Now, do; because you can show one the road to this brute of a place."

"You ought to have joined 'em before, Edward," said the baronet; "Maltravers would hardly have given them the slip then."

"I don't know whether you're joking or not," replied the youth; "but without vanity, I think I may call myself as alert and intelligent about the business of this world as either of their younger lordships; and Nortonborough's a conceited ass, sure to be over-

reached from his opinion of himself. The scoundrel might have escaped me, he might, but I only wish a thousand pounds had been depending upon it."

"And what have you done this season in the shooting line?" said Sir George.

"Bless your heart," replied the other, "no dogs—the devil a dog! I was forced to borrow one from Sir Giles Harlande, and couldn't bring him away so far to the southward as Gray'bourne, you know. I'll tell you by far the best thing that ever happened since the world was created. You've seen mother Brooks, the hump-backed grocer's wife, at Penrith?"

"Look here! look here!" cried the baronet, "here comes Falstaff his own self, the very fat knight in the play!"

Edward turned and perceived a man rather richly attired but in very bad taste, of immense corpulency, advancing towards them from behind. He stopped when they were all close together, and made a profound salutation to the young men.

"Your most obedient, Sir John," said Edward, and the baronet tittered.

"I would not be presuming, gentlemen," observed the stranger; "but if you're not engaged in any very particular secrets, will you allow me to travel in your company?"

"You will do us much honour, Sir John," said Stanley, who thought he must be humorous too, though at second hand.

"Ah! you young gentlemen's very free with your jests," returned the stranger; "what you mean by that there name I can't tell—not I. But this I know, that if you'll allow me to ride along with you 'till we're passed Medlicot lane, ye're welcome to gibe and laugh at me as long as ye like; and unless you choose it, I won't put in a word to interrupt your talk."

"And why, my good sir," said Edward, "do you so desire to accompany us, if you are to make no part of our society?"

"Perhaps, sir, you may not know that Maltravers is loose again, and was seen near

Bakewell last night: I have it upon the best possible authority. Now ye see gentlemen," then stooping and scrutinizing them earnestly, —" yes, yes, I'm sure ye've the look of real true nobility; I've been some years in a tolerable fair line at Manchester, and am obliged to travel on urgent concerns; and the deuce of the thing is—with somewhat about one too." This last intelligence was communicated in a whisper.

" I think we may promise our protection to the worthy knight as far as Winster," said Sir George Stanley.

" Oh, sir! my dear young gentlemen," replied the man, " don't ye leave me till we get clear of Medlicot lane. I am certain it can't take you out of the way, if either of ye's going towards the river."

" We shall leave the town in that case a little to the right; and I really don't think it can be materially out of my way," observed Edward.

" No," said the baronet, " but it's pretty

completely out of mine, I can tell you: I shall wish the knight and your honour a good morning here, I rather surmise."

Edward jogged him—saying softly, "Don't now, don't go, Stanley, I'll show you some fun with the hero of Eastcheap; some uncommon fun!"

The baronet, who considered young Alfreton as a first-rate wit, was upon this prevailed on to proceed, and their companion became profuse in his expressions of gratitude.

"Look ye here, my man," said Edward, "as to the not interrupting us, we make no such agreement; on the contrary, if we admit you to our party, you must be as pleasant and conversible as ourselves. In the first place, what d'ye wear that horn for? You're not much of a sportsman, I reckon?"

"My stars!" replied the traveller, "and doesn't your honour know that there's not a farmer or grazier, or indeed any body much on the road between Wales and Lincolnshire, as hasn't worn 'em ever since Maltravers' boys have been in the midland? We're all sworn

to stand by each other till death in case o' need, if within hearing; and sure am I there's never likely to be a time when they were more wanted."

Engaged in this sort of chat they passed the town of Winster, part of which was seen as they rode by it; and were now far advanced in a rugged and deep lane, having high banks on each side covered with beech wood, at that time of the year glowing with the red autumnal tint.

Young Alfreton here gave Stanley the wink, and pulled up suddenly. "I am extremely concerned master — what's your name, of Manchester," cried he — "but we must really relieve you from the inconvenient burthen of that cash you are carrying about the country."

The stranger paused for an instant; then with clenched and uplifted hands, and every expression of dismay thrown into his countenance — "Pray, gentlemen, what's the meaning of all this? for mercy's sake, I was joking; indeed, indeed, I was. Laud! how should I

have any thing about me? Who are you? What in the world do ye want?"

"Once attempt to blow that horn," said Edward, seeing the other's hand upon it, "and you're a dead man that moment. And to convince you I speak the truth, know, sir, I am Dick Maltravers himself!"

"Do you suppose I have not found that out long ago?" said the fat knight, with a smile that at once confounded our humourists; and winding his horn—From both banks of the lane, with terrific gestures and inevitable activity, poured a band of ruffians; who with very little ceremony assisted the youths to alight, and with as little eased them in about half a minute of cloaks, doublets, swords, and every thing valuable that they possessed.

"Don't use them ill," said Maltravers; "give back their clothes: your horses, gentlemen, I am afraid we must trouble you for, as we're but indifferently mounted just at present ourselves. You've a short walk to Winster; and," he added with much gravity of demeanour, "I never shall forget your

condescension in escorting me hither. Sir John, I think, has met with at least as good success in this as his Gad's hill expedition!" At his signal the robbers cleared off with their booty; and our men of fun and knowledge of the world had nearly come to a serious quarrel, while they trudged back, sulky as bears, to the town.

CHAPTER II.

"Do not make yourself uneasy, Alfreton," said Hugh to his friend late in the evening; "and let me advise you to go to bed; you have already far exceeded your usual time of sitting up."

"Where would be the use of that, if one couldn't sleep for anxiety?" returned the other.

"Now be persuaded—do. If I really thought there was ground for serious alarm in these reports, do you suppose I would not fairly admit it? But I don't, upon my word: by comparing one with another, I discover such inconsistencies and gross improbabilities."——

"Stop, though—" said Lionel, "you believe the fact of the robbery?"

"Yes—yes; I think there may be some foundation for that."

"Well, then," resumed Alfreton, "if they

were not ill-used more or less, why couldn't he have been over here from Winster long ago?"

"For many very sufficient reasons," said Hugh; "he may have been occupied with the magistracy of the place in collecting a force for pursuit; or Sir George Stanley probably—— Hey-day! What's all this? Come here; make haste; look."

From the window of their apartment many lights were now discerned dancing irregularly amongst the shrubs and trees; sometimes all disappearing at once, then one or two only flitting in sight: soon the full blaze of a large party bearing torches came forward together; and now the clatter of their horses' feet was audible, and they evidently approached the inn.

Lord Alfreton dreaded bad news of Edward, and remained mute through apprehension, gazing at the horsemen from the window; while Hugh ran down to meet them, and in a few moments re-ascended ushering in Edward Alfreton safe and sound in body, but sufficiently discomposed in temper. The warm

and hearty congratulations of his brother he got rid of with little enough ceremony.

"There, there," said he, "all this is extremely proper and kind and affectionate, I dare say, but there's not the slightest call for it, Lionel: I have never been hurt, I have never been in danger. Any man's liable to be robbed on the highway, there's no such overwhelming misfortune in that."

"Then it is true you have been robbed?" replied his brother: "I am heartily thankful that the rest of the story which found its way here from Winster proves a fiction. Was it in truth Maltravers?"

"Oh! how should I know? it might be, I can't say, perhaps it was: thanks to your lordships for letting him escape. But come, Lionel, tell us how you go on yourself; 'twas solely in order to see you that I've got into all this trouble."

"Was the robber alone," said Hugh, "or has he drawn together any of his gang?"

"I think, my Lord Mondomer," returned Edward, "you might give me credit for not

suffering myself to be spoiled by any single man in Europe. His gang, indeed! They were nine to one at the least. The loss is a trifle; the dishonour nothing, with those odds against us; but there is a mortification in being imposed upon and tricked into any scrape. Such a flat, such a simple calf, as that fellow Stanley. 'Tis the most disagreeable thing in nature to be joined on the road by a dolt, that falls into every trap that's laid for him."

"Yes, replied Lionel, "it makes one do the very same oneself."

Edward looked as if he didn't know whether that remark was jest or earnest.

"I conclude, however," said Mondomer, "that this last audacious act has raised the whole country. The fellow can scarcely remain in these parts with security."

"I don't care, not I," cried Edward, "where he stays, or where he goes. Life altogether is a mere game of chance, and I'm not one of the sort to he deterred by such an ordinary mishap as this, from just doing every

thing in the same neighbourhood that I should have done before; riding, walking, sporting; just precisely what I please. Existence wouldn't be worth having if one couldn't stir without this and that precaution."

"Well said!" observed Hugh, "that's spirited, and sound philosophy too; I honour you for it."

"I utterly despise the kind of thing," continued the other; "I wish I may perish if I hadn't as soon it had happen'd as not, except for the loss of one's horse, and one or two other confounded vexations. I shall have the deuce and all now to pay this posse of night constables, thief takers, and blackguards, that escorted me over from Winster. One never, you know, could have come by oneself, after sunset, with those villains marauding over the country, and this the wildest part of it."

At such a conclusion of his magnanimity the others had much ado to stifle their laughter; but Lionel, with great good nature, having insisted upon taking to himself the payment of the subsidiary army, the younger, after a

becoming resistance, gave way, admitting that it would be a convenience to him at present: and, in truth, so well pleased did he seem with this arrangement, that he bethought him of calling for something to eat and drink, and would willingly have kept his brother up the greater part of the night, 'till his curiosity had been gratified with respect to their adventures; and, above all, how he and Lord Mondomer came to be travelling together.

"What's the fun, Lionel," said he at last, "of your going on to Gray'burne? I can't be with you there; I can't, upon my soul. I'm called away to town by military business now I've seen you, and my father and the rest of them a'nt returned yet. Lord Mondomer is bound for the metropolis I'm certain, and really think, when you can travel, we'd better all proceed together."

This proposal, in acceding to which he should avoid parting from Hugh, was caught at by Lord Alfreton with avidity; and as Mondomer also liked his recent ally better and better the more he saw of him, the new

plan of operations gained readily the consent of all parties.

In a few days afterwards, on the eleventh, we believe, of the month; Lord Alfreton considered himself, and with some hesitation, was admitted by Hugh, (for his brother entertained no doubt whatever in the matter,) to be fit for the expedition; and by moderate journies, but without any impediment or unusual adventure, they reached London towards the middle of October.

In what degree the landlord of the Crown and Thistle was reimbursed his expenses, and rewarded for his trouble, seems never to have been exactly known. Probably up to his highest expectations; as he observed to a neighbour, on the day of their departure, that the young Lord Mondomer was his guardian angel; twice only he had seen him at his house, and that twice had been the making of his whole family.

Upon the arrival of our friends at Westminster, Edward Alfreton repaired to his father's residence; where the elder would like-

wise have taken up his quarters, had not Hugh, and that without a great deal of pressing, persuaded the latter to sojourn with him in Canon's Row, near Whitehall, till his own parents, &c. should come back to England.

The first room that these young men entered, excited in Hugh a sensation of very considerable melancholy: it was the one where he had held a conversation with his uncle, immediately previous to his departure for Northumberland; and the remembrance of the old gentleman's kindness and affection, to which, as if upon a presentiment that it was the last they should in that place ever engage in together — even his most confirmed prejudices seemed to be giving way apace — was highly affecting, yet grateful at the same time. But before he could indulge in such reflexions, Mondomer perceived a gentleman already in possession of the apartment, who was engaged in writing when they made their appearance.

"Your most entire slave," cried this person, starting up and seizing Hugh by the hand; "here I am, you see, ready to do the honours

of your own residence by you. And my Lord Alfreton too, I protest. I'm charmed to see your lordship, in my opinion, looking better than ever. We've heard of your adventures in darkness and forests, with giants, banditti, dragons, and Heaven knows what, and the rescue of that distressed damsel the fair Nortonborough. But are you recovered in truth? No further inconvenience from your hurts whatever?"

"None at all, thank you," replied Lionel: "How upon earth came you here, James?"

"By a lucky chance for me," said Mondomer, "let it be what it may. Stanley, I'm rejoiced to see you."

"The fact is," said James Stanley, the eldest son of the general, "that from my friend, Edward Alfreton, we have lately received a pretty accurate detail of your proceedings, and intentions moreover; and I expected, in consequence, to have found your lordship established here when I came into the house a quarter of an hour ago. Little will be stirring in London, though his Majesty is here back-

wards and forwards from Hampton Court, for this month and more. So, my father wants you both to come over to us in Surrey, and I have full powers in the negotiation, except the being absolutely forbidden to admit any thing in the shape of a denial. I was just engaged in the best and most forcible letter upon the subject that ever was penned when you arrived!"

With good diplomatic address, James Stanley had included Alfreton in this invitation, though he never entertained the least expectation of finding him where he was, nor had the general thought of him at all. His father, however, could have no possible objection to such an accession to his party, and that James very well knew.

The plan, therefore, was brought under immediate discussion, and, at length, it was settled in the affirmative; but not till Hugh had finished the affairs that brought him up from the North, and till both our young friends should have paid their respects at court. Which duty Lionel, though detesting the operation,

made up his mind to perform; since Mondomer was clear as to the propriety of it, and would likewise accompany him.

James Stanley, after recounting various avocations and engagements of his own, which rendered the thing to demonstration impossible, consented not only to stay dinner with them, but sat gossipping on for a considerable part of the afternoon besides.

"Then you actually think there's no cordiality between them," said Lord Mondomer.

"How should there be," replied Stanley, "when their habits and inclinations are so totally opposite, that the life of one seems a studied course of reflection upon that of the other. Rochester, for instance, the prince despises from his inmost soul, and his father knows he does. That can't be pleasant."

"What an English sovereign prince Henry appears likely to make!" said Hugh. "He will provide work, I guess, for the military spirits of this land; perhaps too much of it; but we shall not find that out in his time. Still," he added, "there are some points about

a certain personage which the prince might admire, one would think. What does he say to the knowledge now, which every body allows to exist in that quarter; the divinity, the scholarship?"

"Why, the young gentleman may be wrong, for any thing I know," returned James, "but upon the most undoubted information I can affirm, that no part of his father's character excites the prince's constant ridicule so much as what he calls his pedantry. By the way, I hear his majesty is engaged in a great work, upon the occult sciences."

"I should like to look at that though," said Lionel, with a yawn and effort to rouse himself: "I respect him for setting his face so steadfastly against those diabolical practices, which in our times have increased so frightfully."

Here there was a pause in the discourse, till James Stanley resumed it. "I am well aware, Lord Mondomer, that you have but little intercourse with your relation the Lady de Lyle."

Hugh looked hurt and alarmed at the evident connexion in Stanley's mind between that lady and the subject they were upon; though the other, whatever his own thoughts might lead him to, certainly never supposed the idea could possibly have occurred to her nephew.

"Very little," replied Mondomer hastily. "You are fatigued, Alfreton; I've seen it this hour; you had surely better lie down upon your bed above than go to sleep here.

"Perhaps I had," said Lionel, rising, and about to leave the room; "if it were only for the civility of the measure. This journey has shaken me considerably, but I shall be blythe when I have taken my nap out; or, at all events, to-morrow morning."

When he was gone, Hugh felt impatient for a topic that should at once crush the subject of conversation which his companion had just commenced: but the eager wish of itself prevented him from finding any at hand; and as he sat in some confusion, Stanley observed:—

"Since you have not much communication with the lady, it is extremely probable you

may be uninformed how she is at present circumstanced."

Mondomer stared at him with gestures of extreme uneasiness.

"Have you heard from her lately, or of her, from any of your friends?"

Hugh shook his head, being absolutely in dread of drawing out any more questions.

"No doubt it will be unpleasant to you, Mondomer," continued the other; "but I consider it the part of a friend to apprize you, that all's at an end."

"Hey! how! What do you say?" cried Mondomer, changing colour.

"All's over with her, I can promise you."

Hugh overthrew his seat as he started up, and paced the room with extraordinary emotion.

"Nay, but my good lord do not distress yourself in this degree; I thought you had been totally unconnected with her schemes, or I never should have told you."

"Go on, sir; go on now, I desire of you," cried Hugh; approaching and leaning down

over the table close to the other, with a countenance of forced resignation. "Let me know the — the — worst. I am prepared for it."

"How very eager!" said Stanley; "I really did not conceive that her mortifications could have been taken by you so intensely to heart; but you must have heard of them from somebody, and 'tis fortunate we are alone. I can inform you, then, beyond the possibility of a mistake, that the intimate alliance between the Ladies de Lyle and Essex —— is utterly at at an end."

Here he stopped for nearly half a minute.

"What then?" said Hugh.

"Well," replied his informant; "and need you to be told that Rochester has joined the latter?"

"Is that all?"

"Indeed is it," said James; "and I should have thought enough too. What your lordship might expect, I know not; but if you consider this news as of little importance, sure I am that its no business of mine to magnify it."

" I can imagine heavier misfortunes," observed Hugh, " than the loss of that connexion. What might occasion the breach between them?"

" No one seems to know; I merely learn it to be irreparable. Ill-natured tales, of course, are not spared by the adherents of either side: they have nothing else now at court to talk about. I see no reason why you, Lord Mondomer, should be inconvenienced by this."

As Hugh did not appear disposed to agitate the matter any further, Stanley shortly after took his leave; and Lord Alfreton remaining in profound slumber above stairs, our hero sallied forth, at about six in the evening, to confer with a sort of humble friend of his late uncle, who had some concern in the disposal of his property and effects. This person enjoyed a place of a subordinate description in the prince's household, and was lodged, by virtue of such situation, in a part of St. James's palace. Thither Lord Mondomer accordingly repaired; and it is supposed transacted business with the other, as he remained at

St. James's till the night was much advanced. On his return along the mall he kept to the southern side, immediately under the park wall; and soon perceived a man before him, whose gestures were rather remarkable. Sometimes he scarcely seemed to move; then he ran for a short distance, clasping his hands together; and then brandished his right arm as if in menace. All this while he was talking audibly to himself; and at length he came to a dead stand, and appeared to be arranging something in his bosom.

Mondomer, who trod lightly upon the grass, was now close behind, and in the act of passing by, when the other extended his arm to its utmost length; then Hugh was struck with the glitter of steel in the moon-beam, and rushing in upon him, arrested the blow which the man had directed at his own breast. The wretch strove desperately to repossess himself of the poniard, till, in the midst of the struggle, the light (for it was a very fine evening) shone full upon Hugh's countenance. The other perceived, and apparently recog-

nised it, and sinking upon his knees, hid his face with both hands.

"Who art thou, unhappy man?" cried Mondomer; "and what dreadful deed wer't thou about to commit?",

The man still kept the same attitude, and not a word or sigh escaped him.

"Recollect yourself," continued Hugh, "and speak to me, who, through a merciful dispensation, may have been the instrument of averting your eternal destruction. Tell me your distress: I wish earnestly to assist you."

The other fell forward at Mondomer's feet, with his face upon the ground.

"The Lord have pity upon thee!" said Hugh, more to himself than the object on the earth, whom he supposed to have fallen in a fit. "What can be done for this afflicted creature? To call the night-watch will perhaps be the most effectual method."

He was moving forward for that purpose, when the other clasped his knees.

"Do ye—do ye, Sir Hugh," said he, his tears now gushing fast, and interrupting his

speech; "do ye, for charity, thrust the dagger into my body, and put an end to't all."

"Save my soul! is it possible? can it be? Rise, man! rise, and exert yourself. What brought you here, Ned? what are your misfortunes? Cheer your heart, and acknowledge the mercies that have been extended to you. By a wonderful chance you have found your former master; and whatever your trouble may arise from, he is disposed to relieve you to the utmost of his power. Why did you quit me, Stone? Speak, I say!" forcibly raising him upon his feet at the same time.

"I be a terrible bad, wicked man, your honour," returned the other: "happiness all gone! And plagued I be with a kind o' dull headach, morning, noon, and night: it never goes off."

"Are you unwell?" said Mondomer.

"It wore and wore on so grievous this evening," continued Stone, "that I couldn't rest no where; so I thought to take a turn by moonlight. Oh, Sir Hugh! that it should be

your honour too, of all people upon the earth——! But you'd better ha' let me die quietly."

"Do not think of it just now," said Mondomer; "turn your mind to something else. Walk on with me, and tell me of your bodily health, which I see is much affected."

"No, no; 'tis my heart that's bad, and as black as — theirs."

Hugh was here shocked by the sudden remembrance of what he had heard respecting this man at the commencement of his journey in Yorkshire.

"Theirs!" he repeated almost involuntarily; "theirs!"

"Aye," replied Stone, "that's a curious thing now — for a wretch not to know when he's well off; when he's got, you see, every blessing as man can wish — as he ought to wish, however. Your honour was a real master to live with, worthy and true; better to me than," —— here he burst into a sort of laugh —— "than — the evil one."

"What is all this?" said Hugh. "Be quiet, Stone; restrain your thoughts I desire — I positively command you. Do not suffer yourself to ramble in this wild manner."

"Why, Sir Hugh," cried the other, "I beg pardon ten thousand times over. Your honour's my lord, and at the head over all the estates: I know'd that well enough, but didn't call it to mind."

He knelt down, and attempted to kiss Mondomer's hand.

"The man is certainly distracted, or intoxicated."

"Not I, Sir Hugh. Intoxicated! Oh, no, no; only fear and sorrow. Horrible works have I seen, my Lord Mondomer." He started upon his feet, and caught Hugh's arm with a grasp that was almost painful. "As sure," cried he, "as my body'll rot in the ground, they be plotting against your life, my dear young master's kind, good, innocent life! by my soul they be!"

"Hush!" said Hugh: "softly! there are people yet about. I'm woefully perplexed:

this wretch is in a sad condition. Come on with me, Ned: come quickly, and you shall be taken care of."

"And ar'nt I taken care of as it is, my lord? Ha'nt they made sure o' me for this world, and the next, and all? I can't follow ye, sir: I be a sinful traitor to ye."

Hugh left expostulation, and attempted to draw him on homeward.

"Aha!" cried Stone; "what, into your lordship's own family again, to see all my old friends, my old fellow-servants, and be cursed by them for a dog and a wizard?"

Mondomer instantly relinquished his hold, and pushed the man from him, with a shuddering sensation of anguish.

"To be sure," said the unhappy being; "to be sure you do: throw me from you, and trample upon me, like all the rest o' human kind. But I arn't without a master and mistress still. I ben't a going to tell my master's name; but I'll tell ye who my mistress be; one very near a-kin ——."

An exclamation strongly expressive of woe

and horror now burst from Mondomer. He stood like one in a trance, and the man continued: "I be forced to leave ye, Sir Hugh; I can't bring my mind to go back among my old acquaintances, not yet. 'Tis all unsettled like in my brain. This time to-morrow night I'll be here again, as certain as the darkness."

"No such thing," cried Hugh, with vehemence; "I will be satisfied now," and was advancing to seize the man; but the latter, who had gradually retreated since Mondomer quitted his hold, now fled from him across the mall with great rapidity. Hugh darted forwards to cut him off from the plantation on the northern side; in which attempt he came himself in such furious contact with the trunk of a tree, as stunned him for nearly a minute; and when somewhat recovered, the moon had passed beneath a cloud, and her light was totally withdrawn.

CHAPTER III.

How Mondomer returned home he was entirely ignorant: he saw nothing, heard nothing, and quite forgot where he was. The desperate and abandoned career of his relation, the unconnected but ominous hints of his former follower, absorbed his whole mind, till he found himself at his own door. It wanted but a few minutes of midnight; but he, unaware of that circumstance, asked if Lord Alfreton was up.

"Up, my lord!" said the servant; "he has not left his room since your lordship went out."

"Give me a light," said Hugh.

"I beg, my lord—I hope," stammered out the man; "I hope nothing—no harm has happened: its on the stroke of twelve, and—and—your lordship looks pale and disordered."

"No matter," returned Hugh; "I'm per-

fectly well; give me the light, and get you to your bed."

Lord Alfreton rose, so thoroughly invigorated by a long and uninterrupted sleep, that he can be no longer described as an invalid, and went, soon after breakfast, into the city upon his own affairs. When he came back, the hour was still early, according to our present distribution of the morning; and he found Hugh pensive and not very communicative, pacing the saloon backwards and forwards, exactly as the other had left him. After an observation or two on Alfreton's part, the answers to which were but unsatisfactory, "Do you know, Mondomer," said Lionel, "the use that I mean to make of your friendship?"

"Hey, use! oh, by all means; you may rely upon it in every event, and command me as if I were your own brother."

"That's truly kind, and the reply that I expected; but the advantage I mean to make of our intimacy is this — nothing is so painful to me, when suffering under any anxiety or

distress of mind, as to feel destitute of a friend to whom I can unbosom myself. It often happens nevertheless, because very few suit me, or enter into one's feelings. You do, however, and so completely, that I shall look to you for consolation; aye, steadfastly shall I, in every possible perplexity. Now, how can I benefit by your advice, unless I give you my entire confidence, and withhold nothing from you?"

"Do so, Lionel; do so, my excellent friend: I am proud of your good opinion, and trust that your confidence in me will never be misplaced."

"I wish," continued Alfreton, "you thought as favourably of me. You are uneasy, Mondomer; something has disturbed that serenity of temper, which I well know is not discomposed by trifles. You were from home all last night; you returned in such a state as alarmed the servants; and through the whole of this morning I have been unable to get from you a connected answer upon any subject whatever. You think me, perhaps, actuated

by mere curiosity: if so, you do me less than justice. Can I be of any service to you? Do consider it, Mondomer: I would gladly walk to the farthest end of China to alleviate your trouble."

He held out his hand, which Hugh pressed affectionately, and continued to move as before, drawing the other with him for some time, in silence.

"Never since the hour I was born did I stand more in need of a friend's sympathy," said Mondomer; "that's unquestionable. I will tell you all, or none. Now, Lord Alfreton, I have certainly a strong desire to open my whole heart to you; and in so doing I shall give you a power that might be used to the ruin of—some—of—part of my family; and to my own confusion and misery."

"If you think," replied Lionel, "that a suspicion of my abusing the trust, may hereafter give you one moment's uneasiness—say no more, and depend on it I will never again annoy you by resuming this sort of discourse."

"Come down," said Mondomer, after another pause, "to one of the lower terraces in the garden; we shall be free from all possibility of being overheard there."

How far, in the unreserved communication which Hugh now made to his companion, he endeavoured to sink the presumed guilt of the baroness, his relative, we are not apprized. Something he might have omitted; but most certain it is that he gave to no part of her conduct any gloss inconsistent with the truth. Of Belton, his distress and uncertainty there, he added nothing upon the present occasion: already he had hinted what he deemed in fairness sufficient: besides, Mondomer felt, that after the late behaviour of the Harlandes by him, (bitterly painful it was to think so), but undoubtedly there remained no mutual engagement to confess.

With what Hugh related, however, Lionel's entire soul was wrapped up in wonder! amazement! which, striking in with his passion for the marvellous, gave him a thrilling feel of

interest that almost amounted to pleasure, checked only by the consideration of his friend's anxiety.

To serve Hugh, to restore his comfort, and see the end of these dark and threatening events, formed now the great object of Alfreton's life; his faculties were all engaged in it, and even Blanche, for the time, lost her accustomed empire over his thoughts.

No sooner were these youths left alone at the conclusion of their dinner, than, for several hours without intermission, they sat deep in speculation upon Ned Stone, mysteries, sorcery, fiends, Lambeth, and Forman.

"I'll show you the very place when we are at Stanley's," said Hugh.

"Won't that be rash, and a tempting of Providence?"

"I think not: we may go in the day time. No question but I could find the way once more. What is your opinion, Alfreton, of that poor creature's parting words? Do you imagine he will actually be in the same spot

to-night again? I am resolved to take the chance of it."

"Faith, 'tis all so wondrous strange," replied Lionel. "But, yes, I shouldn't be surprised if he was: I'll go with you."

"Excuse me," said Mondomer; "it would be injudicious surely. Is it likely, even if the intellects of the unhappy man should not be so far perverted as to prevent him from explaining his situation to me, that he will venture to speak out before a total stranger? Oh, no; don't attempt it."

Alfreton acquiesced, and they continued in consultation till Hugh judged it time to depart. Soon afterwards, several of the superior domestics dropped, one after another, into the room, ostensibly for the purpose of inquiring as to Lionel's accommodations, now he was left by himself, and of taking his orders for the evening; but in reality with the hope that something might fall from him to satiate their spirit of curiosity, highly excited by the troubled air, agitation, and feverish appearance

of their lord upon his return home the night before; and by no means allayed by his sallying forth again, long after dark, and for the first time, within nearly twenty-four hours. Not one syllable of information, however, could be extracted from Alfreton, though he preserved no impenetrable silence, far from it.

He talked to them of Hugh, and was loud upon his merits; he asked questions relative to the late Lord Mondomer and the family history in general; the subject of the Baroness de Lyle always excepted. Upon that topic he dared not, he determined not, to trust himself; and kept to his resolution. By these means Lionel, for a considerable time, succeeded in detaining some of them about him; which, to say the truth, was the main object of all this affability. His nerves had been shaken by his late accident and consequent indisposition; and his imagination, powerfully affected by Hugh's narrative, teemed with such gloomy, fearful, and undefinable ideas, that he had no vast delight in being left, in a spacious and somewhat melan-

choly apartment, entirely to his own thoughts. But the servants could not be kept there for the whole night; and when they were gone, Lionel walked to and fro at a brisk pace, stopping from time to time to keep the fire in order. The abbey chimes now beat four distinct rounds, which were succeeded by the deep tone of the clock sounding eleven: he sat down in an immense elbow chair drawn close by the hearth, and took pains to convince himself that Mondomer might be expected back every instant. Alfreton had never been up so late since he was wounded; he grew heavy, but roused himself with vigour whenever he began to doze, as if apprehensive of something occurring to shock him should he go to sleep: then drawing off from the fire, he seated himself resolutely, and commenced a letter to his father. The first three lines were tolerably straight, but he repeated the same word five times in a sentence: the writing now proceeded diagonally—he made two enormous blots, laid down the pen, and rested his head upon his hand while he considered what

he should say next. The pen, which lay balanced upon the edge of the table, fell to the ground, without any effort of his to recover it, and within a minute afterwards Lord Alfreton slept fast. Wild visions now presented themselves to his imagination, flitting and desultory; he fancied himself at last conversing with his own mother about Hugh Mondomer's alarms and forebodings: she obstinately turned her face from him, and the frightful suspicion arose to his mind that he had made a mistake, and was talking to the Lady de Lyle. With a convulsive start he here sat upright in his chair, and broad awake, though for some time doubtful of that fact. A tall figure of a woman, wrapped from head to foot in a rich purple mantle, stood before him; and Lionel, fixing his eyes upon her countenance, knew her to be the Baroness de Lyle.

He gasped for breath; and not in the least degree doubting that what he saw was a supernatural apparition, he rose from his seat, and clapped his hand almost unconsciously to his sword.

" You are dreaming yet," said the lady, with a composed voice and manner; " my intrusion has surprised and startled you: my Lord Alfreton, I think."

Lionel said nothing; but stood amazed, scarcely trusting to his eyes or ears. The lady walked to the door, and called to the domestics:—

" How is this? was I not informed that my nephew had established himself here?"

" Why, your ladyship," replied the man who had admitted her, " went straight into the saloon, before I could mention that my lord had gone out, and —— "

" Is he absent from home, Lord Alfreton?" said the baroness.

" He is, madam, at present; but only for ——for——a short——he will probably soon return."

" I cannot wait," said she: " be pleased to let him know that I expect this visit to be repaid, and the less he delays it the better I shall be satisfied. Your own father and family, are they in England yet?"

" I believe they are, madam. In England? Oh, no; certainly not."

" Your lordship is then a resident here?"

Alfreton bowed assent.

" Excuse the disturbance I have occasioned; and pray inform Lord Mondomer that during the whole forenoon he will have no difficulty in seeing me."

She waved her hand to forbid Alfreton's attendance upon her; who however, followed, carrying a light to the great gate of the court, where her own people awaited her with torches.

Upon inquiring into the circumstances of this most unexpected step on the part of the baroness, Lord Alfreton learned that so far from having glided like a fairy unperceived into the mansion, she had rung twice at the bell in considerable impatience and vehemence; and immediately, upon her entrance, made for the principal room, without suffering any one to precede her. Lionel was in no danger now of falling asleep again; and not very much gratified with the perturbation he

had manifested. The next time the bell sounded, nobody throughout the dwelling heard it plainer than himself. He rushed to meet Hugh; and as soon as they were alone —" Well," cried Alfreton, " well; just give me the leading particulars, and to-morrow we'll consider them at our leisure."

" He never came at all," returned Mondomer, with a dissatisfied air, " and I have nothing to tell."

" But I have a great deal," cried Lionel; and proceeded to make known to Hugh what has been just related.

" 'Tis well," said Mondomer, as they parted for the night; " I had resolved, at any rate, to see her —— for what has become of that ill-fated wretch, I must and will discover. The man has been cruelly used, that's clear, till his mind is unsettled; and some horrid proceeding or other has urged him to attempt his own life, with his sins upon his head."

Before Hugh was dressed in the morning his steward was announced, who had just arrived from the north.

"How fare you, Hannacott?" said Lord Mondomer; "never in my life was I more pleased to see you. What troubles are laid up for me it is impossible to say; and 'twould be uncomfortable not to have you about one."

"Purely well am I; I thank your lordship."

"And how did you leave matters in Northumberland? the vicar and his dame?"

"All sound and flourishing, my lord; there's been some blusterous storms and tempests, as has done mischief among the woods; but nothing, I hope, to make a noise about."

"That must be expected, more or less, as winter approaches," said Hugh. "By the bye, Hannacott, have you happened to hear any thing of the neighbouring families?"

"Why, yes, sir; there was Sir Ralph Beccalie, and a whole drove on 'em come through the village with the stag-hounds: it might be a week ago. And where d'ye think they driv' the hind, and catched her? Why, in Dame Chichele's farm-yard, in the pig-stye, of all other places. And oh, laud, my lord, such a deed have been done in the north! the

whole country rings of it; in the county joining to Mondomer too."

"How! Cumberland?" cried Hugh, with some apprehension: "tell it me; tell me presently."

"Your lordship won't believe it," said the other; "but 'tisn't more certain that its now daylight, than that Master Peppywash, the great squire as lives below the Cross Fell, has took and married his cook."

"Poh! what's that to me? I thought you might have something to say about my — my nearest Cumberland neighbours."

"And so I have, my lord, if you'd heard me out; I was coming to that: not as I've seen any o' the family but Joe Hart; and him only twice. There's been the Dickens and all at Belton!"

"No harm?" cried Mondomer in considerable alarm.

"I don't know whether your honour reckons Satan himself being let loose harm; but such a to-do has been kept up about the old abbey o' late; and such terrible,

shocking sights seen in the dead o' night! For my part, if I'd believed one half what the common people tells about those parts, I'd had no sleep in comfort for the last three weeks."

Hugh made signs of impatience for the other to proceed.

"There's one, Vavashire, I think the name is, as Sir Giles has suffered to live in the old forsaken tenement, called 'Friar's Close;' and they took it into their heads (the people about you see) how that he was — was — somewhat out o' our human kind, your lordship, and at the bottom of all this rumpus. So the folks ris', and was a going to burn 'un; but not a soul did they find when they come to the place; and next day, Vavashire, he goes in great wrath to the hall, and made complaints and purtestations. And Sir Giles took 's part, and, says he, wasn't the t'other a poor persecuted man as couldn't live any where else; and where was the proof, says the old gentleman; and not one on 'em should injure the hair on his head without that."

"I do recollect hearing of some such person," observed Lord Mondomer, "indeed: What became of him? All this must have been sadly distressing to the family at Belton Hall."

"What become o' Vavashire, my lord, is more than I can say; but this much I can tell ye, that all the servants o' Sir Giles, one and all, was in a dreadful hubbub; and he wouldn't stay, and she couldn't stay, and t'other run off without any leave asked; and the talk was, when I come away, as how the young ladies and their father, and the whole on 'em, would quit the place till this were blown over a little."

"How! abandon their residence altogether?" said Hugh.

"I didn't understand that, sir. Oh, no; Joe Hart will be left to take care of the hall, with some trusty young chaps, tenants' sons. Old Joseph's a bold fellow; clear conscience too, I take it, my lord; and as for Dick Ascham, the miller, he fears neither men nor fiends, they say. In regard to his conscience,

my lord, I don't know about that, one way or t'other."

"Had the rest absolutely left Belton when you set out?"

"I think not: the last I heard was what I've been a telling your lordship."

Hugh now took a few minutes to complete his attire.

"Of course, Hannacott," said he, as he adjusted his sleeves, "you must have been well acquainted with the character of that Stone, who lived with me to the time of my uncle's death?"

"But little, sir: faith, I fancy nobody knowed much about him."

"Did you think well of him?"

"Why does your honour ask?"

"My uncle, you know, John," continued Mondomer, with a smile, "never could bear a question instead of an answer. I've a sufficient reason for it, trust me I have."

"I doubt he was a bad one," said Hannacott.

"We may probably," replied Hugh, "have more to talk about upon that matter hereafter: 'twould be barbarous now to keep you longer from your breakfast, after a ride of twelve miles this morning."

CHAPTER IV.

Lord Alfreton accompanied his friend to the dwelling of the Lady de Lyle; and when they presented themselves at the gate, the porter, with look of jealousy, expressed some doubts whether his lady could be seen. Hugh announced his name; but, instead of giving him a ready admission, the man immediately disappeared, and soon returned, preceded by a female, middle-aged, to judge by her looks, with sharp and forbidding features.

"Yes, that is certainly the Lord Mondomer," said she to the other servant; "but — but it is most likely he was expected here alone."

Lionel speedily undeceived them as to any intention of his to enter the house, and turned back forthwith. Mondomer was not now taken up stairs as before, but ushered into a principal apartment on the ground floor, furnished with magnificence. Nobody was in

the room when he went in; but the same female who had reconnoitred his person remained with him for a time, collecting some detached writings, and arranging them for removal.

" You appeared to remember me a minute ago," observed Hugh; " and I have no recollection of you."

The woman continued counting the papers: " Fifth, sixth, seventh," and so on.

" Have you lived long in this family?"

" Too long," said she, tartly.

" Ha!" cried Hugh, as if struck with a sudden and curious thought. " Your name is Catherine, I rather fancy."

" And how, in the name o' wonder, should my Lord Mondomer know that? You were here one morning in the summer; I saw you then, my lord, and never but then, since you were an infant."

Having given this piece of explanation, she paused, staring at him, and awaiting a further one on his part apparently.

" You have a person, I believe, of the name

of Edward Stone, belonging to this establishment?" said Mondomer.

"Have we?" returned the other: "not to my knowledge."

Hugh was irritated at her answer.

"Do you pretend to tell me, that a former attendant of mine, of that name, is not at this very instant within?"

The woman smiled maliciously; and pointing to the opening door, stood close by the side of it till the baroness entered, and then took her departure.

"Lord Mondomer," said the lady, "I came at a very unusual hour to your house last night, in order to inform you of what you will be greatly surprised to hear. I stand in need of your assistance."

Mondomer, who thought very differently of her at this time, from what (he was willing to do at least) when their last meeting took place, coolly replied, "My disposition to be of real service to you, madam, you have no reason to doubt: but before you proceed with particulars, I hold it necessary to explain

myself. It is needless to repeat the subject of our last conference: you were, upon that occasion, indignant, uncommunicative, and contemptuous. But you will pardon me, you must excuse me, madam, when I observe, that such a demeanour, (however calculated to overawe your dependants) had no tendency to remove or alleviate the cause of my uneasiness. I request your ladyship to reflect for an instant upon what has occurred since that interview. The only brother that remained to you has been taken from us under all the afflicting circumstances of an unexpected and very rapid illness. I have no wish to give you pain, but conceive myself compelled to ask whether your conduct on that mournful occasion could even have been contemplated as possible, by any one of a reasonably well-disposed and affectionate heart?"

He stopped and regarded her with a melancholy air.

"You were about to add something," said she: "I purpose not to interrupt you."

"Your own shrewd and powerful observa-

tion upon mankind, madam, will convince you far beyond any thing I can say, whether it be in the course of nature, after the treatment I have received from you, not to feel my mind alienated, my original respect for you destroyed, and my suspicions, (forgive the indispensable expression), my suspicions strongly and grievously excited!"

"Have you any thing more to say?" observed the lady.

"Madam," replied Hugh, "I have this much more to say; I am still willing, Heaven is my witness, I am beyond every thing desirous to be effectually useful to you. From the bottom of my heart do I wish there existed any probability of our living together with the cordiality of the nearest relationship. But however harsh it may sound, it is my duty to inform you plainly, that I shall lend myself to no schemes inconsistent with a fair explanation of past misunderstandings, (you comprehend) if I have been in any respect mistaken; with repentance and reformation, if I have not. It distresses me infinitely to talk thus to you,

madam, of all people on the face of the earth; but, at the same time, I have not done it without reflection."

"Vastly well, sir," replied the lady, in a tone of levity quite unnatural to her; "you put some things better than I supposed you capable of, and amuse me rather than otherwise. But thus it ever will be when the fortunes of the powerful are falling. Strange things I must now accustom myself to hear, of which you are pleased to give me a sample and specimen. Hugh Mondomer, I fancied myself moderately well acquainted with the confidence and conceit of youth; but the audacity, the matchless and inordinate folly of your last effusion, soars above all my experience. I take no further notice of it. Listen to me, young man: you see a woman abandoned (no matter how or why) by those to whose fortunes her own were entirely united. And perhaps you imagine I am about to complain of treachery, ingratitude, and other similar qualities, that mankind are apt to be reproached with. You might fairly

be impatient were such my intention; but I have no thoughts of it. The struggles of despair are not altogether without a certain sort of gratification; and I may yet face my enemies, though the chances are wondrously against me. Now your aid is absolutely requisite to sustain my rank in society, to restore the power and influence of your family; and let me also assure you, most seriously, that your own safety, and the enjoyment of the mighty advantages you possess, are solely dependant upon your exertions in this crisis."

"Be pleased to speak intelligibly, madam," said he.

"So far," cried the baroness, in shrill accents, "from quitting the world, and shunning the face of mankind, it is incumbent on me to come forward now, more proudly, more fearlessly than ever: weak minds must be acted upon with energy and effect. You talk to me of the cordiality of near relations: whether or no such bond of union may really exist between us, Hugh Mondomer, is of the

least imaginable importance; but it must be held forth to the world in this emergency; aye, by both of us. You stand now the last head and representative of our line. We must act in concert, and all may be retrieved. Your confidence, your ostensible confidence that is, becomes essential to me at this juncture; and I shall soon convince you, that your interests are all equally involved in the family alliance."

"Your ladyship thinks fit to talk in a dark and enigmatical strain," replied Mondomer, "far above my comprehension. It gives me great distress, however — very great, to hear you; and this I take leave to say, once for all, that the mention of my welfare in connexion with your desperate projects, is shocking, and highly offensive to me."

"But they *are* connected," said she, in the still tone of rage, with difficulty kept under.

Hugh turned from her with a sigh of despondency.

"Do you decline my proposal, nephew?

He made no reply.

"By all your hopes here and hereafter, I warn you to have a care," cried she; "you may bitterly repent it."

He regarded her with an expression of the deepest concern; but said nothing more.

"By my eternal soul, you *shall* repent it!" she screamed, while her eyes turned white, as if in convulsions, and her whole countenance was distorted.

"For shame! for shame!" said Hugh; "have you no control over these transports of passion?"

"Curses on thee, for a mawkish, whining, spiritless wretch!" she exclaimed; and rushing towards the door, her foot slipped upon the polished oaken boards, and she fell with her head against a projecting corner of the wainscot. Mondomer, dreadfully alarmed, sprung forward, and raised her in his arms. No blood flowed from the hurt; but she remained senseless, when at that moment Catherine, with a readiness which clearly evinced that she had been so situated as to lose no part of the conversation, burst into

the room, and quickly procured other assistance. Hugh waited, indulging a faint hope that this accident, in its effects upon her bodily strength, might so far soften the baroness, as to give him some influence over her mind, and induce her to listen at least to what he might have to urge for her eternal preservation. But, upon opening her eyes again, the agony she showed at the sight of him, the rekindling flush of anger on her cheek, and abortive efforts to speak, added to the advice, or rather sullen injunctions of her woman, that he would be gone, without doing more mischief, determined Hugh to leave them, after ascertaining that the lady had met with no material injury.

CHAPTER V.

Lord Alfreton, during the whole of this interview, had been parading the street where the baroness' mansion was situated, not without considerable impatience in the main, though for a while his thoughts were diverted by a trifling occurrence. He saw approaching him a beautiful young woman, gaudily attired, and talking so loud as to attract universal notice. She hung, he was sure of that, upon the arm of Lord Rochester; and on the farther side strutted no less dignified a character than his Crown and Thistle friend — my Lord of Nortonborough. Alfreton advanced to the earl with the freedom of an old acquaintance; but was received by a movement of the head, rather sideways than forwards, and a slavering kind of smile, expressive, as Lionel thought, of as much disgust as pleasure at their meeting again. With this, our young friend, who hated the town and all its ways, was, at first,

excessively nettled; though his good sense, and even pride indeed, soon convinced him, that resentment was any thing but the feeling due to such behaviour. He had dismissed it from his mind for some minutes, when he felt a tap on the shoulder from the earl himself, who had overtaken him now, but without his party.

"And how's my good Lord Alfreton, after all our troubles, dirt, and worry at that beastly hole in Derbyshire?"

Lionel stopped, contemplating him with a grave air, and pointed with his stick for the other to go by.

"Aye! but how remarkably well you're looking though," said Nortonborough, slipping his own arm within Alfreton's, and walking on with him: "no need to ask whether you are recovered, I imagine? By the way, didn't I meet you here about a quarter of an hour ago? Could have sworn 'twas a face I'd seen before. Faith, I should have been sorry to have passed you without notice; for my Lord Nantwich your father, and I, were always great; and, by

the mother's side, you know, we are very near relations."

" Relations are we?" said Lionel, as if thinking of something else: " I wasn't aware of it;" and seeing Hugh at that moment towards the end of the street, Alfreton shoved the other off with exceeding little ceremony, and hastened to join his friend.

So full was Mondomer's heart, that he had no longer the slightest reserve before Lionel: he trusted to him implicitly; and, in a walk which they took straightway into the fields, to the northward of the palace, gave him, without reserve, an account of all that had been said and done during his last conference with the baroness.

For several days after this, Mondomer made perpetual inquiries, both in person and by message, about the Lady de Lyle; and not only was refused admittance, but could obtain none but the most general and unsatisfactory answers. On the twenty-fourth, the king returned to town from Surrey; and as it was understood that a court would be held the

two following days, our friends determined to go on the earliest, and get it over. They repaired to Whitehall towards half past two; for his majesty had declared his intention of dining before he showed himself in the circle. Many however of the chief nobility, and others of distinction, had assembled by the time the Lords Alfreton and Mondomer entered; who declared to the principal lord in waiting the circumstances under which they came to be presented. Struck with Hugh's youthful appearance, that nobleman inquired, with an apology for the freedom, whether he were yet of age; and was readily informed that he had entered upon his twenty-second year much about the period of the late Lord Mondomer's death: an event which we omitted to mention before; and which accounted for the day having been suffered to pass over without such festive doings, as would have made old Cheviot smile again. Alfreton, though much more of a child in his habits, was at least a year older. The crowd now thickened apace: Rochester arrived, and

manifold were the bows by which he was acknowledged:' he passed Lord Mondomer with a toss of the head, meant to be disdainful; and treated another personage, who stood within a few yards of Hugh, in the same contemptuous manner: but the latter seemed resolved that things should not go off so.

"Step this way, my lord of Rochester," said he, with a firm though quiet tone.

"How, sir!" returned the viscount, "do I hear you aright?"

"Come out of the crowd;" repeated the other.

"Oh! by all means;" said Rochester, not without some discomposure at the expectation of immediate defiance.

They turned into a gallery; and the guards stationed there having fallen back upon Rochester's signal—

"So you no longer deem it worth your while even to acknowledge me?" said the gentleman, at whose proposal they had withdrawn.

"I am not constrained to be fawning upon all the world," returned the peer.

"Were you ever the worse, my Lord Rochester, for any courtesy you may have adopted on my advice and recommendation?"

Rochester drew up, as if to carry it through by sturdiness.

"My present intention is not to quarrel, but remonstrate with you," continued the other. "Without any advances on my part, you sought my friendship at the commencement of your elevation: whether my counsels were given in the spirit of truth and faithfulness, and how far you have profited by them, your lordship best knows. If I may judge from testimony under your own hand, as well as verbal assurances innumerable, they have not been totally disadvantageous to you."

Rochester writhed, and grew very uneasy.

"Upon the first disgust at advice that was unpalatable to you," resumed Overbury, "how have you treated me? Neglect and caprice I am not now speaking of: but tell

me honestly, Lord Rochester: do you not hate me? are you not become my enemy?"

The minion trembled: he called to mind the deed of horror in which he had participated; and faintly uttered, "If I—if I have—whatever I have done—if called upon properly—I shall—be prepared to justify."

"My opinion of you has fallen," said Overbury, with the tone of complete superiority; "but in virtue of former regard, I am still desirous to be of service to you. My motives may be ascribed to envy, perhaps, or jealousy; but, for the last time, I warn you that you will be undone by your associates. The character of the late Lord de Lyle's widow is tainted! is already held in abomination! and of all mankind, art thou alone so weakly, so fatally heedless ——."

"Far from it!" interrupted Rochester, with much eagerness; "I affirm to you, upon my honour, I have broke with her: her very name is detestable to me."

"I wish the alliance may not have endangered your lordship already," said the other.

" Now will I fairly point out to you the path of honour and manly conduct. That woman, if she have not resources beyond other human beings, will hasten her own destruction. It will be your duty, Lord Rochester, to see that her innocent relative is not affected by her disgrace. The present Lord Mondomer is an ingenuous and noble youth: I know it, and have spared no pains in the inquiry. You know it likewise, my lord. Freely extend to him the hand of reconciliation: generously avert from him) and you have all requisite power,) the dark cloud that lowers upon a portion of his family."

" You have ever, sir," replied the favourite, " assumed the right to catechise me in this strain; and till you audaciously struck at the one grand object for which I live and breathe, I patiently submitted to it. Even now I shall condescend to advert to your observations, however ill-timed or obtrusive they may be. You do not imagine that any drunken squabble with the young man you just mentioned has exalted him to the importance of my enmity?

The hand of reconciliation indeed! I have no knowledge of the boy; nor ever had. As for the rest, it is provided for already; make yourself easy. The fact of his being on notorious ill-terms with the woman, his relation, is his safeguard and security; and you may rely on it, no person is better apprized of that circumstance, than the highest in the realm. Alas, Overbury!" he continued, with some bitter tears of remorse, "this short conversation must have convinced you, that where my confidence is not abused, I well appreciated the value of your friendship, and am not devoid of hope—of wishes—that we may yet—I know not—why, why would you cross me in the point dearest to my soul? In that passion, without the gratification of which, all I have attained on earth is as dust and chaff in my estimation."

"And art thou," said Overbury, with sternness, "so miserably ignorant of our common nature, as to require the being told, that to the most successful, occasional disappointment is inevitable? Is it your wish to pre-

serve high distinction and power? Cast away, if so, the idol you bow down to? You prefer, perhaps, your pleasures to your ambition? Prove, then, how far degradation and universal contempt can be sweetened by the blandishments of that dazzling compound of vanity, presumption, folly, and wickedness."

Lord Rochester broke from him, and strode quickly to the further end of the gallery: then returning — "You mean to persist in holding this language?"

"Constantly," replied Overbury; "judge of it as you may."

The favourite raised his hand to his forehead with violence; but recovering himself, "You will act and speak, sir, exactly as you think proper," said he with sudden calmness, and even politeness: "we now thoroughly understand each other indeed!"

They had not returned to the drawing-room three minutes, when, by an undulation amongst the crowd, it became clear that the king was present; and every body giving back as he approached, Lord Rochester made his way in

an instant to the royal side. Mondomer and his friend having been long waiting, were far advanced in front of the throng, and in the immediate vicinity of the monarch. That illustrious personage had been pretty free with his cups, as appeared in some measure by his articulation; and still more by the flush on his cheek, and unsteadiness of his humid eye.

"No, Robin," said James, with an oath, and prayful push of the favourite from him: "No, you are out there; that's not the reason why the queen will have nothing to do with us to-day. Though, by my troth, as you say, this old hovel of Whitehall is hardly a place where a gentlewoman can be seen. We'll set it to rights, if I live, and show 'em what a king of England's palace should be. Who's that? My lord of Nortonborough? Shall I tell you, my lord, what the malicious say about your being so much with the Lady Essex, and this idle boy Rochester here?"

Nortonborough bowed to the earth, and grinned.

" Why, they say that your spindleshanks set off to advantage this silly fellow's leg. Ha! ha! ha!"

The laugh, in many a peal, was re-echoed by the train of courtiers, both male and female.

The king had now edged round to Lord Mondomer, who knelt and kissed his hand.

" They give me a good account of this young man," said James, turning to those about him: " Is it true, my lord, that the late baron died so immensely rich?"

" My uncle, sire, has left his estates unencumbered," replied Hugh.

" That's well," rejoined his Majesty; " I wish all the rest of my nobility may do as much. How frequently, my Lord Mondomer, may the Baroness de Lyle, the widow, have been with you in the north since your uncle's decease?"

" Never, sire; not once."

" You are young, my lord; very young. Keep to your innocence and integrity. We have all our infirmities. Heaven forgive us!"

said the monarch, wiping his eyes, which watered grievously at that moment. " But it affords me pleasure to hear any young nobleman so well spoken of as yourself. Hold fast your integrity. A sound conscience, my Lord Mondomer, is the best ——, is the only ——, is every ——."

Here he cast his eyes upon Alfreton, looked round to inquire who he was, and received him very graciously, but did not stop long.

As our two friends were quitting the hall, they suddenly confronted the Countess of Essex. She twisted her person, screwed up her head, and rolled her eye-balls with all the insolence she could assume. But in the last operation, having taken a glance at Hugh and his companion, whom she thought about the prettiest looking young men she had seen that day, (and to the admiration of such she was constantly accessible) the lady descended at once from her altitude, and addressed our hero precisely as if she had been on the same terms with all his family as before. Mondomer, however, talked — coldly, as could be con-

sistent with civility, and left her full soon, according to Alfreton's notion, who was curious to listen to a person of whom he had heard so much, and in no little admiration of her beauty.

Next day, in the afternoon, Hugh again inquired at the baroness' mansion, and was told he had need to be under no further apprehension, for the lady was well enough to have gone out, and was then actually at the court.

"Can that be possible?" said Mondomer to Lord Alfreton, as they returned. "I am uneasy in mind, Lionel; woefully so. Which way to look forward, or what to hope for, I know not. You took notice of the king's expressions yesterday?"

"Without doubt I did: they struck me, even through all the flutter and confusion I was in myself. I'll tell you what — I shouldn't be surprised—she's a dauntless woman—and I have often heard his Majesty may be worked upon by boldness and an overbearing manner."

"Do you think so?" said Mondomer, musing.

Much about this time they met with Geoffrey Stanley and Edward Alfreton, arm in arm.

After the first salutations—"I thought," observed Edward, "that you two gentlemen purposed to pay your respects at Whitehall?"

"We never intended to take up our abode there," said his brother; "and having got the business over yesterday, both of us held it unnecessary to go again."

"'Tis very well you did," returned the other quickly; but stopped short upon a violent nudge from his companion; which manœuvre was visible to our friends.

"We are not long since come from thence," added Geoffrey.

"Did any thing happen in particular? Out of the common way?" said Lionel.

The others hesitated.

"'Twill be as well not to observe upon it in the streets," said Mondomer, palpably troubled. And as young Alfreton and Stanley assented to that position with much readiness,

it is probable they had no fancy for proceeding with the discourse.

They took leave somewhat abruptly, and our youths had entered the porch of Lord Mondomer's house, when Lionel, with an air of vexation, reminded the other that James Stanley had been invited to sup there.

"Very true," replied Hugh; "he has so. I didn't think of it. All this is distressing indeed. Nay, upon my word, though, I am not sorry we are to see James; I like him far the best of the two; and whatever has occurred cannot unhappily long be kept from my knowledge: we may as well hear it from him as any one."

The hours passed heavily till eight o'clock. Hugh could attend to nothing that at all tended to divert his ill-boding thoughts; and Alfreton's impatience, mixed with shuddering apprehension, kept him in a similar state of restlessness.

Stanley was at length announced. He ran

hastily to Hugh, and seized his hand with warmth.

"Depend upon it, my dear lord," said he, "it is impossible, utterly impossible, that your family name, or individual reputation, should suffer in the remotest degree. I have had opportunities of hearing how you are spoken of by every one, from his Majesty, downwards; and if I may be allowed to call myself your friend, there never was a moment of my life in which I felt prouder —."

"Mondomer is totally ignorant," cried Lionel, interposing, "what all this alludes to."

"How! have you not heard then of the — the — scene at the palace?"

The entrance of domestics with supper cut short all reply to that last observation; and Hugh was consigned to all the irritating feelings of uncertainty, and the most painful curiosity; but the others sympathized with his distress: the meal was hastily despatched, and the attendants dismissed. They then drew their chairs round the hearth; and Mondomer, who had scarcely spoken since the last inter-

ruption, looked hard at James Stanley, as a sort of signal for him to proceed with what he had to say.

"Stay till all are fairly out of hearing," said Alfreton.

"Alas! alas!" replied Hugh; "my servants may soon have little to learn upon the subjects that now chill my very blood with dreadful anticipation. Go on, Stanley: be kind enough not only to tell me in general what took place at Whitehall; but to recollect the absolute necessity of my being in possession of the real — the worst — the entire truth, so that nothing shall come by surprise upon me hereafter."

"Your kind and generous disposition, Mondomer," said Stanley, "will naturally lead you to share in the afflictions of your relations, however notorious it may be to all mankind that they have slighted you when they could have been most useful; and that so far from intimacy and affection, hardly the common appearances of a near connexion have ever been kept up between you." He now observed

some tokens of impatience in Hugh. "Nay, I say no more; but you must be conscious that what I have to relate concerns the Lady de Lyle. I came to the palace much about the time when his Majesty made his entrance. There was an immense assemblage. As usual, he remained for some minutes, chatting and laughing with the pets, as we call them — Lord Rochester, his beloved, &c. The king appeared in extravagant spirits, and was telling some story, that, as far as I could make it out, seemed to bear hard upon the lord treasurer, Suffolk; when the crowd, with a good deal of fuss and bustle, gave way, just behind those to whom his Majesty was talking; and the Lady de Lyle had opportunity given her, and what's more, given with marked parade, to come forward in front of the line, close by her former friends. One couldn't help fancying that her look showed a confident expectation of all this easy access being afforded her as a prelude, on their part, to a renewal of the alliance. That may, or may not have been the case: if it were, grievously,

indeed, was she disappointed. The favourite circle took pains to make it evident, that they shunned her with scorn: Rochester averted his eyes in anger, not to say disgust; and the Lady Essex shrunk back with apparent horror. How far a certain supereminent personage had previously agreed to the part he was to play, may be doubtful: I am inclined to suspect things did not come absolutely by surprise upon him. He approached the baroness, as if to perform the customary salutation—paused for a moment—then turned rudely from her to the next in course, without a syllable uttered, and with a look of studied displeasure. Many, I assure you, Lord Mondomer, thought it strange that his Majesty should lend himself to those silly young people's resentments. But you are now apprized of all the principal facts; and it is unquestionable, I fear, that the grand career of the Baroness de Lyle has finally closed."

Alfreton made an involuntary sign, as if dissatisfied with this conclusion; but, on Hugh's account, restrained himself from all

further remark. In fact, Mondomer was equally so; but, at the same time, irresolute, whether or no he should renew the conversation: at length, with an effort, which manifestly cost him some pain: "Stanley," said he, "I am convinced you have not told me the whole; and for my future measures and conduct, it is positively indispensable that I should be informed of every thing. Nay, nay; what signify shrugging your shoulders, and those looks at Alfreton? did the king speak to her, or did any one else?"

"I was told," replied James, "for I could not hear it myself, that his Majesty addressed the person immediately beyond the Lady de Lyle in such a manner as to convey the effect of actual slight; indeed downright roughness and incivility toward the baroness. He stood talking, with his back turned directly upon the latter, although she nearly touched him: it was the Lady Latymer whom the king accosted. 'By the rood, madam,' said he, talking of her husband, I believe, ''tis no excuse at all: he should have been here yesterday: he should

have been in attendance this morning. Those habits of indolence, madam, will, in the long run, master all our good qualities: and, faith, sometimes many of our vices also. But I am no unreasonable sovereign; I can well make allowances for frailties that I experience in myself.' Then, suddenly turning short upon the baroness, he added: 'Some diabolical sins there are, which I set my face against; which it is my duty not to forgive; and so help me Providence, I never will forgive or overlook them, whatever may be the station of the offender!' Having pronounced these words in so loud and harsh a voice as to draw down the attention of every soul upon them, his Majesty flung indignantly from her. My dear Lord Mondomer, nobody, I assure you, guessed — was aware, I mean —— I'm sure, at least, I haven't the slightest conception what the king adverted to. No, all suppose it to be some malignant effort —— Some — some report put about by those who are now become her enemies."

Hugh walked away from the fire, where the

others were sitting, and appeared no longer attentive.

"What course did she take? how did she behave under this insult?" said Alfreton, eagerly, to James Stanley.

"In my life," returned the other, "I never witnessed such gloom as in her deportment, yet without losing the air of superiority that we have all so frequently remarked: I never saw any thing so melancholy; I may say, so awfully interesting. She first reddened with passion, and drew up, as if she meant to answer the king; but her spirit seemed to fail her — her colour went: she looked deadly white, as if on the point of fainting, and stood for a long time exactly in the same place, disregarding the gaze of the whole assembly; for all stared upon her, actuated by different motives, of curiosity, hatred, wonder, triumph, or pity. When she moved, every one made a lane for her to pass, and endure, in a different form, the scrutiny of universal observation. One person only — no less a one than Prince Henry himself, addressed some words to her,

in offer of assistance I fancy, by ordering up her servants, and enabling her to leave the place. The lady would have declined it, but the prince led her out, and she absolutely leaned upon his shoulder as they walked on, being, to all appearance, in need of the support to prevent her from falling."

Mondomer now joined them again.

"I shall go to her this instant," cried he; "now, when her grief and despair are at the highest: this may be the only remaining moment when comfort can be administered, when remonstrance may be efficacious."

"Pardon my freedom, Mondomer," said Stanley; "but really I speak it in tenderness for you; very awkward rumours are in circulation, more than I could dwell upon just now; and you should be cautious."

"How say you, Lionel?" cried Hugh.

"Go, by all means," returned Alfreton: "she is destitute of all counsel, sympathy, and consolation: she has not a friend in this world but yourself. Go, by all means!"

James Stanley offered no further objection;

and they all three went together to the house of the baroness. There they learned that she had not returned home at all from the palace; but had since sent for her confidential woman. At what place they were to meet, the servants were, or professed themselves to be, totally ignorant; and the abbey clock struck ten as the young men turned away from the Lady de Lyle's gate.

CHAPTER VI.

We now revert to the commencement of the present month, when matters were going on at Belton much as Hannacott had described them. The common peasantry around had long felt a distrust of Vavasore, which his forbidding aspect and unsocial mode of life contributed not at all to remove; and toward the end of September, the ordinary progress of nature was thought to be so unusually disturbed, and such things were heard and seen about that person's secluded residence, that a formidable tumult at length broke out.

The house was sacked during the night, and had Vavasore fallen into the hands of the rioters, his fate would not have been doubtful. As it was, he contrived to conceal himself; and Sir Giles Harlande (as we have already heard) interposed once more for his protection. For a day or two he was detained in Belton Hall, to the consternation of the domestics;

as even there his habits were not altered — he obstinately resisted attending any assembly of the family, either at meals, or morning and evening worship, and confined himself as much as he could to his own apartment.

Sir Giles remonstrated with him upon conduct so injudicious at the present moment, so open to suspicion, and calculated to increase their trouble. During this conference, Vavasore proposed that the other should aid his escape, in disguise, from the north altogether. To this the knight objected in toto, and not without considerable roughness. He reproached Vavasore with unthankfulness for past benefits, by adopting a course of proceeding which, though it might be consistent with innocence, (he, the knight, heartily hoped it was) seemed yet calculated, by a show of mystery and particularity, to involve the whole neighbourhood in confusion. Sir Giles added, that all these unpleasantt circumstances would oblige him to leave the country for some time; a step extremely odious to him; and he thought it best, till these storms in and about

his house had completely spent their fury, to absent himself and all his daughters as far from Cumberland as the metropolis. The old gentleman further declared, that Vavasore should accompany them openly in his own proper person. He was determined to ascertain whether he had been imposed upon: as for the tale of a participation in Catesby's plot of November the fifth, 1605, the knight insisted, that after such a lapse of time, and supposing the truth of the alleged fact of the other having in no way contributed to it, except by subsequent services towards one of the conspirators; it was idle to talk of Vavasore being in danger still on that account; and even with his interest Sir Giles protested he would answer for the pardon of the other, when the whole case was known. But be that as it might—proceed to London he should, or (the knight was going to say) be left in custody at Carlisle. Vavasore, however, interrupted him, and with haughty defiance of all his detractors, as he was pleased to term them, expressed the most perfect readiness,

and indeed impatience, to commence their journey, whatever peril he might incur by it.

Some other points were settled between them, for Sir Giles now adopted a very different tone with him from his former one; and the old gentleman, the afternoon being far advanced, returned to his daughters in the small sitting room.

"Well, girls," said he, "you be all prepared, I take it for granted: to-morrow morning we start with the lark. No waiting-maids, remember; ye must all dress and do for one another in Lunnon, the same as on the road."

"There will be little difficulty in that," observed Blanche.

"And I've so contrived," added the knight, "that Tom will be up there two days afore us. I shall gi' un a bit of a letter to an agent o' mine, and he'll provide a decentish kind of a lodging against we arrive. What d'ye think, girls? that sulky, forbidding fellow above stairs shall be o' the party too, and come to some account of himself."

"How! Master Vavasore?" said Blanche.

"You surely do not mean it, father," cried Elinor, in alarm.

"To Lunnon shall he go, by all that's sacred! will he, nill he."

"Nay, father, consider," said Elinor; "we don't know what he is; we don't indeed. Suppose," she added, looking round with terror, "he should turn out to be—what—what the people say he is; all in the midst of some horrid desolate waste."

"Suppose he should; I'll ha' him dragged up to Lunnon, nevertheless, by the ears. If he be a helpless, ill-used man, here am I ready to do 'un a sarvice: if he be any—any thing bad, as they throw out, Giles Harlande ben't the man for such as he to play their tricks upon."

"I'm diverted at your fears, Elinor," observed Margaret. "What possible harm should that old object do us, with my father and the four men servants attending? The worst will be, a journey of near four hundred miles, as they tell me; and we shall have to sleep many a night upon the road."

"Oh, so we shall!" cried Elinor; "at inns, my dear, hey? with every sort of racket and bustle about. Now that's my chief comfort."

"Elinor seems to have supposed, father," said Margaret, "that all our days were to be passed in dreary deserts; and all our nights in some such place as Lannercost Abbey."

"Methinks she do, Margaret," said her father; "that's it — laugh at her well for her fancies; do, my good straight-forward lass. I'll ha' none o' ye cast down at that chap; he's done mischief in plenty hereabout, without that plague over and above. Why, Elinor, girl, thee'st seen 'un ever so often, and talked to 'un: what's the matter wi' thee?"

"It is an odd circumstance, father," observed Blanche, "that I never did. Whenever we have gone together to Friars' Close, this gentleman has constantly been absent; and, except at considerable distance, I have not even seen, much less made any acquaintance with him, since he has been living within our house."

"Thee'll ha' the opportunity then to-night,

for the first time," returned her father: "the man's promised to come down to supper. I wouldn't take no refusal. No more of them dark doings and mysteries for me: I won't hear o' such nonsense."

The nine o'clock bell rang, however, and supper was brought in. They all even sat down, and had made some attack upon that refreshment; but no Vavasore. Sir Giles fretted, and was in the act of sending a peremptory message, when the former entered. He was attired like a person of distinction half a century before, in grave, yet costly habiliments, and made his obeisance to the company with dignified address.

Vavasore took his place at the table, and showing no inclination to converse, his presence threw a gloom over the whole party; notwithstanding the cavalier tone of the old gentleman, and his determination not to be awed by so questionable a character.

Blanche often stole a glance at him; but as often was repressed by meeting his eye, as if he were studiously acting on the defensive;

and something in its expression gave her an unpleasant sensation.

Vavasore's countenance, as usual, was disfigured with scars, and made obscure by bandages: he spoke not during the repast; but courteously drank with the knight when applied to, and appeared attentive to the few remarks that were hazarded.

"Cheer up! cheer up! Master Vavasore," said Sir Giles, when all was finished; "thou'rt a cup too low, man. I say now again, as I've told thee afore, act but an honest, open part, and I'll defend thee 'gainst the whole north o' England: they shan't touch thy little finger—trust me. What! don't be faint-hearted. Many a one makes enemies just only by differing from common customs and habits, or may be by even doing his duty alone: and thee'st made some enemies in these parts, I fear."

"He, sir," replied Vavasore, "whose advancement in age has invariably been marked by some accession of calamity; who, whether with or without a cause, for I scorn here to

enter upon any apology for my general conduct, has been through life abandoned or persecuted by his fellow beings, is apt to meet with enemies wherever he presents himself, though he may not make them."

"What's the matter, Blanche? what's the matter, my dearest?" cried Elinor loudly, while Margaret hastily poured out some cold water, and pressed it upon her sister.

"Why, Lord ha' mercy upon us!" said Sir Giles; "the child looks like death itself! Alack! alack! Here, Hart! Robert! what will become on her?"

"Stay, father!" said Blanche, feebly, though now, however, recovering herself; "it will soon wear off: I have been taken so before."

"Never, as I see," quoth the knight.

"The presence of a stranger probably," observed Vavasore, "may be oppressive to the young lady, if she feels herself indisposed;" and he took that opportunity to withdraw.

"How do you find yourself now, Blanche?" said one after the other.

She was certainly much relieved.

"We'll put off the journey to-morrow," said Sir Giles: "I shall ha' no moving — and she in doubtful health."

"On no account, father, alter your plans," cried Blanche: "I beseech you, do not think of it: this was merely accidental; and I shall be quite well in the morning. I am well now, in truth, and faithfully promise to let you know it, should I feel unequal to travel."

Sir Giles looked incredulous and uncomfortable.

Margaret suggested that something taken at supper had disagreed with her sister; to which the knight, having no system of his own ready, assented.

Elinor did not feel entirely satisfied with that solution, but made no opposition to it: and in one thing they all cordially concurred — the necessity of retiring to bed forthwith.

Blanche, in her meditations before she went to sleep, reproached herself for having yielded to the powers of imagination; and endeavoured to reason down the appalling idea that had

shocked and greatly disordered her. Upon the slight glimpse which she caught of the stranger, while supper was proceeding, she felt a suspicion that she had seen him before, from a peculiarity about his eye: and when he began to speak, at the tone of his voice (a very remarkable one) her heart sunk within her. It must be, she was instantly persuaded, it must be the very same person who had alarmed her by the side of the rivulet; and whom (she could not but feel the strong conviction) she had since seen in company of the Lady de Lyle, under circumstances never to be forgotten.

Blanche, however, determined, being still without proof of the fact, to control her emotion, and, by forcing herself to meet and converse with the stranger, like the rest, to avoid adding to her father's uneasiness under his present embarrassments.

Having formed this resolution, she would now, as it was extremely late, have gladly composed herself to sleep; but her attention

was arrested by indistinct and extremely unusual sounds, which broke in upon the silence that prevailed throughout.

Particularly prone to terrors at this moment from the prior agitation of her spirits, Blanche sat upright, and listened with all the attention she could exert. The noise proceeded from a part of the mansion at a distance from her apartment; and she now heard footsteps likewise. Her anxiety became so great that she rose, and, partially opening her chamber-door, stood, in trembling expectation of what might next occur. But here she was speedily cheered, to her entire satisfaction, by recognising the voice of Hart, as he shut one of the doors in the gallery below; and she watched with pleasure the flash of the light that he bore, as it danced upon the walls of the old hall, till it finally disappeared on his reaching the bottom of the staircase, when all was uninterrupted silence again. Upon this the young lady softly returned to her bed, and her rest was not delayed for ten minutes longer. Vavasore appeared at their hasty and

early breakfast; behaved, as in general, with propriety of demeanour, and exerted himself to some effect, in appearing more like an efficient member of society. Blanche had now perpetual opportunities of observing him, as far as observation was practicable. Whether her dismal conjectures were removed or strengthened, we are unable to say. She certainly showed no fresh symptoms of disquiet, though she was sparing in her communication with him; as were her sisters likewise, who shrunk whenever he approached them. The interest of Sir Giles likewise in the fate of this strange character was not unmixed with painful sensation; and he occasionally addressed remarks to the other, the replies to which only inflamed his curiosity. The old knight now repaired to the quadrangular court, where he was occupied some time in examining the horses, and directing the course of their expedition. Blanche had a palfrey to herself, while the younger girls were sentenced to ride double, each behind a trusty domestic. Vavasore's black charger excited

the admiration of the whole party. Sir Giles was mounted to his heart's content; and two more followers, well armed, completed the escort.

Nothing ever goes quite right upon the first arrangement; therefore, after the cavalry was duly set in order, much remained to be improved: pillions shifted, stirrups shortened or lengthened, &c. &c., before the young ladies could mount.

While this was in progress, Sir Giles and the butler, in earnest conference, had walked away to the further side of the court.

"Every single night d'ye mean to say, Joseph? Were it the same last night too?"

"Worse than ever, your worship," replied Hart; "as I'm a sinner, I feared the whole family must be disturbed, men, women, and all on'em."

"Then what the deuce am I to be at?" said his master. "I were willing to think favourable o' the fellow. I say, d'ye think one ought to travel in such company?—can one venture? Something might be done; yet I

be loath to deal harshly by 'un. What d'ye say to't, Joseph? — do say somewhat, prythee do."

"Venture, Sir Giles? Laud help us, yes. Wor' he the black gentleman himself, I shouldn't be afeared on him, journeying as you do, your honour."

"A'ter all," said the knight, "what is't can be said again the man — that he raves in's sleep, forsooth, and moans like a madman. Now look at me: thee dostn't take me for a witch or a conjuror, or the like o' that?"

"I don't, your worship, Sir Giles."

"Well, then, if I sup off o' cold roast beef, I roar like a bull all night long; and for that, I suppose, thee'd ha' me burnt to a cinder in the market-place at Carlisle."

This dialogue was now interrupted by the appearance of the ladies and Vavasore on horseback, moving toward the outer gate; and after some more brief injunctions to the butler, the old gentleman mounted his steed, and followed them.

When they had entirely turned their backs

upon Belton, the air appeared to produce a favourable effect on Vavasore. He talked much at length, and with more than usual consistency; he pointed out to his fellow-travellers the bold outline formed by the great western hills, and showed himself well acquainted with the situation and productions of them, and the lakes and villages connected with each. Indeed they scarcely passed through any place, however insignificant, but he had some piece of local history to relate about it; and accurately did he appear to be versed in family anecdotes respecting such landholders' seats as caught the attention of the party, and the present condition, prospects, and character of their owners. By such exertions, though certain misgivings associated with the person of the stranger prevented his being absolutely agreeable, his conversation was undoubtedly striking, and secured the general attention.

This Vavasore perceiving, continued through the whole day such efforts at pleasing as were very uncommon with him; and it was not 'till the shades of evening began to thicken

apace, that he relapsed into his habitual gloom and taciturnity. At the inn where they were to sleep, that dejection became peculiarly observable: he ate nothing, but drank copiously and alarmingly of undiluted spirits, which, however, had no more visible effect upon him than as much milk and water.

Soon after the girls had retired, Sir Giles suggested that the day's journey would probably dispose his companion for immediate rest likewise. "We ha' looked out a good decent bed for thee," added he.

"You might have spared yourself that trouble, Sir Giles; I am a bad sleeper."

"How d'ye mean?" said the knight, "thee'll lie down to be sure, and get some sleep; why, human nature can't go on without it, Master Vavasore."

"Whatever degree I indulge in must be taken here," rejoined the other: "I shall keep up a sufficient fire to dispel the night air: let me not detain you, sir."

"Good night t'ye, then, if ye will have it so," said Sir Giles.

Vavasore shook his head with some impatience.

"Heaven guard ye, sleep where you may," continued the old gentleman.

The other turned away shortly, and in much disgust.

On leaving the room, Sir Giles gratified himself in a long coze with the landlord; a habit the former was given to at inns. Upon the present occasion, he freely expressed his doubts as to the soundness of his travelling associate's mind; mentioned, with wonder bordering upon contempt, Vavasore's resolution to sit up the entire night, and advised the host to have somebody at hand, in case he should do any thing strange, even if they didn't contrive to watch him constantly.

This the landlord promised should be done. Whether he kept his word we have never been informed; but understand that the night passed over without disturbance.

CHAPTER VII.

The following day being cold, bleak, and comfortless, Vavasore's reserve was little noticed, as the whole company were somewhat out of sorts, and disenclined to talk. A good dinner, however, at Lancaster, brought the knight completely round, and proved not unacceptable to any of the others; and when they resumed their course to the southward, a discussion took place between Vavasore and Sir Giles, upon the merits and misfortunes of Sir Walter Raleigh.

The knight was a warm admirer of that romantic and extraordinary person, and repeated a well-known story of Prince Henry having ridiculed his father for perpetually confining such a bird in a cage. Vavasore dealt not in admiration; he was coldly sarcastic upon the extravagances of that great man, and observed, that if his wings were shorn it was all his own doing, as he suffered himself to be

fettered by the most pitiful of all weaknesses, inconsistency: for having thrown off many of the restraints of principle in the prosecution of his schemes, he had the contemptible folly still to adhere to so much as baffled his grandest efforts, and must, in the end, consign his head to the block.

Warmly engaged in such discourse, they could scarcely believe it when Margaret pointed out the spires of Preston, their resting place for the night. They rode quite through the town, and took up their quarters at a homely but very large house in its outskirts, on the south side, which at that time was known by the sign of the Hand and Gauntlet.

The inn was crowded to inconvenience; but the ladies being a good deal wearied, were willing to put up with the accommodation of one room, with a moderately large bed in it; to which a second, by the aid of chairs and benches, was added. Blanche fixed upon the latter as her property, 'till she discovered that Elinor actually and seriously preferred it, from the novelty attached to a bed so created on

the sudden, and the sense of something like an adventure which was joined to the idea of sleeping there. The girls pretty early took possession of this apartment, and the two men remained in a public room below stairs, (no other was to be had), where several different groups of company were collected. The fire-place being closely blockaded with tables, our companions drew their's to a distance.

They ordered refreshments suitable to their different tastes, and the knight would fain have proceeded with the talk that had engaged them on the road, but could, by no means, command Vavasore's attention. The latter was evidently discomposed at the mixed assemblage around them, and could scarcely conceal his irritation, when a stranger of grave demeanour, an ecclesiastic. to judge by his dress, thought fit to seat himself at their table, immediately opposite Vavasore.

The man, however, had a right to any vacant place he might find in the room, and all complaint would have been fruitless. So Sir Giles, who, to say the truth, caught at

any body that he could have a little gossip with before he went to bed, inquired, in his most courteous mode, whether the intruder had made a long journey to day?

"Will you believe me, sir," replied the other, "if I should say that I came from Lockerbie, in Dumfries-shire?"

"Not if you say you came from any part o' Scotland upon the same horse."

"I never dreamt of making such an assertion, sir," said the man smiling.

A flask of wine was then set before him, and he offered some to Sir Giles, who tasted it with wry faces, and returned the civility by pressing the other to partake of some beverage that he had cooked up, accompanying the proposal with asseverations of its superiority to any wine that could be procured in Preston.

The man next, with a polite movement of the head, made the same offer to Vavasore, but he pushed the wine from him, without saying a word in reply.

"And you, gentlemen, I doubt are from the north also," said the stranger.

"It be, I declare, the oddest possible thing," observed the knight, "but so 'tis, that whenever I travel southward, the folks always find one out to be a north-country man; and when they don't tell it me, I see clear enough they think so. Howsever, I ben't ashamed of my county—old Cumberland's the place, master—What's your name? My service t'ye, sir."

While Sir Giles was drinking, their new acquaintance turned to Vavasore: "Both Cumberland gentlemen, I presume."

"Wherever I may come from, sir," returned Vavasore, "it seems probable that you will know me again."

"Why so?" said the other.

"I do not choose, sir, to be stared at in this manner," replied Vavasore in anger.

"I have the unlucky habit," observed the stranger, "of resting my eyes upon particular people, while my mind is wandering: I did not heed your countenance, believe me."

"Perhaps not; but I take this opportunity to apprize you, that it's offensive to me, par-

ticularly so, to be stared at, and I should imagine, not very delightful to any body else."

"May I occasionally fix my eyes upon you, sir, in the course of our conversation?" said the man, addressing himself to Sir Giles, with a most provoking sneer at his fellow-traveller.

"May thee fix? To be sure, man, to be sure, and welcome. I fear no one's gaze, not I; and he as looks in my face, looks in an honest one, though a bit homely it may be, master What-d'ye-call-'um."

"And how has corn sold in the Carlisle market this autumn?" inquired the stranger.

"Oh! it fetched the deuce and all of a price," returned the knight, "to what it did last year. But ye get pretty near me now, sir, when ye're at Carlisle."

"If the gentleman means to say," observed the other, "that he's a resident in the vicinity of Carlisle, it is really surprising that I should be ignorant of his person. Few, I fancy, if any, of the chief landed proprietors in that part of the island, are unknown to me."

"No! d'ye say so, my friend? Be pleased to tell us, then, what acquaintance thee'st kept up wi' the family at Belton-Hall, near Longtown?

"And have you, Sir Giles Harlande," said the man, "actually believed all this while, that you were a stranger to me?"

Vavasore could repress his indignation no longer. "If you mean, sir," said he, "to be further endured in the company into which you have obtruded yourself, you must not consider those who compose it as fools, liable to be imposed upon at your pleasure. You know nothing, sir, of this gentleman; it is plain to me you were utterly ignorant of him, 'till, by tricks and stratagem, you picked up the place of his dwelling. Your behaviour, sir, is unsuitable to your own pretensions: by your habit, you should be a — a — minister of the church."

"Nay though," cried the knight, "don't be cross with him, don't be rough upon a gentleman as we mayn't ever see beyond to-night."

"Thank you heartily, Sir Giles, for taking my part," said the stranger, with imperturbable serenity of manner: "I am not conscious of having given just cause of offence to either of you. Nothing could have shocked me more than to have behaved improperly by you, Sir Giles; but your companion seems provoked at my acquaintance with your name and station, and imputes it to trick. Will he allow me to declare what I know of *him?* upon whom I have practised no deception; with whom I have hardly exchanged three words."

Vavasore said nothing for some time; but the sudden contraction of the muscles of his face, the restless movement of his limbs, and the sullen inarticulate sounds he uttered, all proved the distress with which this interloper somehow or other had power to afflict him. At length, in a peculiarly clear and strong tone, in which suppressed fury was without difficulty to be distinguished, he replied, "I am an elderly man, sir, as you see. Your profession is likewise questionable: you may be a priest, and secure from the common effects of resentment.

But mind me! neither my age, nor your condition, shall entitle you to proceed in this company as you have done. You fully comprehend me. Such liberties (grossly absurd as they may be) are at any rate unsanctioned by the general laws of society. Your conversation assumes an impertinent and inquisitive turn: be still, sir."

"You come now," said the intruder, "to hard words and threats: and 'tis plain I must confess, or be ill-used, that I was wrong in saying I could tell any thing about you. Bless you, sir, I'm but a simple, innocent soul; I have no occasion for disguises and habitual falsehood; nor, after exhausting my own genius in arts of wickedness to circumvent mankind, have I had recourse to the Great Deceiver himself!"

Vavasore's countenance grew black as night.

"Do you object," said he, "to taking a turn in the open air? I have an observation or two to make, meant for your own private ear."

"I attend you!" replied the other.

"Well, but what's there to do now?" said Sir Giles.

"We shall return to you in half a minute," said Vavasore, as he led the way out of the room, and was passing beyond the porch into the yard of the inn, when the stranger stopped him.

"I am in no such haste, sir, to find myself alone with you in total darkness: nobody overhears us: wait for an instant under this lamp. Master Vavasore is in wrath, it should seem, and has taken a high tone with me."

"You have a different person to deal with now," said Vavasore, "from the dull and ignorant Sir Giles Harlande, and will produce no effect upon me by your discovery, through some juggling contrivance, of my name."

"Your name has not been mentioned, however," returned the stranger.

Vavasore faltered in spite of all his efforts. He attempted to reply; but his tongue refused its office.

"Petulant you may be, and peevish," continued the other; "but your obligations to me

are far from small for reserving this communication till we were clear of witnesses. Let me try how a different appellation will suit you."

Here he whispered for one moment in the ear of the other; and Vavasore, aghast, and reeling from the sudden failure of all his powers, must have fallen to the ground, but the wall supported him. His strength and fury as suddenly returned: with a frightful yell he flew upon the stranger, fastening nearly as possible upon his throat. The man paid back the compliment with equal vigour; and being the younger of the two, had at first some advantage in the grapple; but his foot slipped, and Vavasore pressed him to the earth, with his knee planted full in his stomach.

The light now shone direct upon the face of the undermost.

"By the spirits of hell!" cried Vavasore, "'tis he! and not an instant to be lost!"

He freed his right arm from the grasp of his adversary, and drawing a dagger from beneath his cloak, had meditated a blow with deadly aim, when the stroke was impeded from

behind; nor could Vavasore, while the desperate struggles of his opponent continued, by any means shake off the gripe of Sir Giles, who threw himself upon the ground beside them, and laboured with both hands to master the right arm of the assailant, roaring, at the same time, most lustily, "Murder! help here! landlord, hollo! gentlemen all, murder! murder!"

They were shortly surrounded by a crowd, whose first care was to separate the combatants, and secure the weapon; while Vavasore, pale, haggard, and breathless, seemed utterly confounded, and incapable of giving any explanation.

"Are you hurt, sir?" said the landlord to the stranger who had been overthrown.

"Not in the least."

"He would surely have taken your life," continued the innkeeper: "but he shall answer for't: you may trust me, we'll keep him fast."

"Do so, by all means," returned the man. "But hark ye, Master Paxton," added he,

slipping money into his auditor's hand, "it happens to be a little inconvenient to me to stay for this investigation. My horse, I think, stands ready saddled in the stable?"

"Why, if 'tisn't convenient to your honour to stop," said the master of the house with a kind of nod, "that's another thing. But nobody's suffered to squabble and stab at the Gauntlet, I promise thee."

This said, mine host repaired to the main room, where he beheld Vavasore hedged in between a table and a recess in the wall, in custody of two or three lusty farmers; while Sir Giles was soothing and comforting his daughters, who, on hearing the word murder repeatedly pronounced in their father's voice, had got up again, dressed hastily, and ventured below stairs. He soon, however, explained to them his fears of an impending quarrel, and resolution to follow and watch the parties at some distance, in order to prevent mischief, which he was barely quick enough to effect after all.

"I say, Goodman Paxton," cried a fellow,

whose attention, diverted by the fray, was now again very much engrossed by a broiled red herring, "you must tell the other gentleman to keep in the way to-morrow, and be ready to swear what he has to swear again this here —" pointing to Vavasore.

"No such thing," said the landlord; "'twere just a common dispute like; and there's no harm done. Let the gentleman out o' the corner there, Master Sheepshanks; the t'other doesn't mean to parsecute: he's gone on with 's journey."

"What's that you say?" cried Vavasore, recollecting himself at this intelligence. "Detain him as you shall answer for it to the king! His life is forfeit for ten thousand offences: 'tis the outlaw and robber, Maltravers!"

"Odd! if I'd know'd that eight minutes agone!" returned the landlord: "we're too late now, I doubt."

"Mount, and pursue him then!" said Vavasore: "but beware of his despair; he cannot be far off: shoot him at once upon the spot! Dead or alive, there's a reward of

an hundred marks for delivering him up to the sheriff of any county in England."

Upon this piece of information, every body talked at once for a full quarter of an hour, and nothing was done. Sir Giles, wearied by his exertions, (very considerable for a man of his years) withdrew to his chamber, without troubling his head about Vavasore's accommodations; and next morning was greeted by the vastly perplexing intelligence that his male fellow-traveller, having paid his own bill with much composure and liberality, had taken his departure between eleven and twelve over-night; but in what direction nobody knew, or indeed, with the exception of Sir Giles himself, cared a straw. The cabinet council, which was straightway summoned, and at which the knight and all the three young ladies were present, came to no other resolution than that of proceeding without him. Much amazement, however, was expressed, many conjectures, and some terror; and a great deal more was felt. Blanche doubted about acquainting her father with the suspicions,

that now almost amounted to certainty in her mind, to the prejudice of their late companion; but was averse to ruffling him upon the journey, and adding to his existing difficulties.

At every step, in the course of the day's progress, the two younger girls were looking about them with fear and caution; and their talk, if they conversed at all, had a reference, more or less direct, to the black art, and the dreadful secrets possessed by its professors, who, as Elinor insisted, could assume the form of birds or beasts, or become invisible at their pleasure. Nor was Blanche in a much livelier state of spirits, though she declined giving her sanction to such appalling doctrine. Towards the close of the day they veered to the eastward, and put up for the evening at a sufficiently comfortable country inn, in the northern part of Cheshire. Here likewise they met with no private room for their own party; but were shown into a clean and commodious apartment, enlivened by a blazing wood fire, and only shared with them by two quiet men,

one of whom was a neighbouring school-master.

The strangers, with much modesty and civility, were abandoning the fireside altogether; but Sir Giles vehemently opposed it.

" Not for the world, gentlemen! No such doings: plenty o' room for every one on us. Pleasant enough this blaze, a'ter a long raw day's ride.'

" Heave on some more logs, Master Greigson," said one of the strangers, " and make way for the ladies to sit up in the corner there."

" Thank ye, gentlemen! thank ye!" said the knight. " Pray, whose be that park — grandish place, faith! — for several miles together o' the road's side, as you come toward the village?"

" You see it but sparingly from the road, sir: 'tis a part of the Nantwich property."

" Adzooks!" cried Sir Giles: " thee dostn't mean we can be so near at hand to Gray-burne surely?"

" No, no; this is a detached estate. Per-

-haps you know something of my lord's family, sir?"

"In truth do I, some on 'em: seen but little o' the earl, indeed. But come now, he and my lady, how do they drag on? Is it older and wiser; give way thee a little, and give way me a little in my turn; or cat and dog to the end o' the chapter?"

"Whatever charms the celebrated seat of Gray'burne may possess in situation and appearance," said the schoolmaster, "there are, I fear, but few symptoms of the golden age within doors. But I ask pardon, sir; it is plain I am addressing myself to those much better grounded in these matters than I can be. You will remember, however, that you put the question to us."

"Why should'st think we know such a deal about 'em?" observed the knight.

"This trinket affords some presumption of it," returned the other. "Allow me, madam, for an instant ——."

Elinor, in searching for something, had spread, during this dialogue, the contents of

her pocket upon her lap; and the instructor of youth, selecting for his inspection a certain brooch, with the Nantwich arms engraven thereon; the damsel exhibited one entire glow of the deepest crimson.

"My dear Elinor," said Blanche, "I'm surprised that you never should have shown me this before."

"So, so, young lady," cried her father; "sly enough, sly enough. Well, and which o' the Alfreton lads made thee this here present?"

"Are you quite sure it was a gift, father?" said Margaret, laughing.

"Don't be absurd," returned Elinor: "the truth is — that — that — you, sisters, were at Netherbie, you know, when last he came — when they came over to Belton; and this was left — left by one or t'other in the room where he slept. What means had I of sending it back earlier, Blanche? But we may — perhaps, that is, if we should see him in London. My dear girl, keep it safe, will you, and return it?"

"Not I, indeed," said Blanche: "I am certain it can't be in better hands than yours, who have hitherto treasured it up with so much care and discretion."

This would have been a subject for vast merriment with Sir Giles, had he not been restrained by the presence of those whom they found in possession of the room; and to whom he again addressed his remarks upon common matters, and had the satisfaction of passing an agreeable evening with two sensible, rational, and not unentertaining characters. For the remainder of the way, their days' journies were moderate, and unmolested by the reappearance of Vavasore, or robbers, or any other material impediment. But easy as they took things, the young ladies were so far fatigued by the time they reached St. Alban's, that it was resolved to halt an entire day there, before they made for the metropolis.

At this place, according to previous arrangement, they heard from their avant-coureur, that Master Fleetwolde, Sir Giles's agent, had secured them good lodgings in a rich

citizen's house on Tower-hill; an exceedingly creditable situation, at that period, for a country gentleman who made no pretensions to rank himself among the grandees and courtiers. Indeed the same house became afterwards the property of the Lord Savage, who seemed to consider its distance from Whitehall as no such shocking and insurmountable objection. This business being accomplished to their satisfaction, and the party well accommodated for the present in a convenient inn, the Castle,

"Now this be just what I enjoy, girls," observed Sir Giles, as they sat after supper, the last evening of their stay at St. Alban's. "Here we be, all difficulties got over, every thing in readiness for us to-morrow. Here we sit, I say, wrapped up like, and comfortable."

"Is the Tower, father, a great, old, frowning place like Mondomer Castle?" said Elinor.

"What put that into thy head, lass? Mondomer! Pooh, no: it be well worth thy seeing though; for there's plenty o' history

belonging to't: what wi' coining all the money o' the land there, and old times, and murders, and what not."

"Pray, sir," said Blanche, who was tolerably acquainted with her father's stock of stories, and dutifully determined that his glee should at least be kept up till he went to bed; "pray, was not there a horse shown in London some years ago, that performed strange and astonishing feats?"

"Bless the girl, yes. What, did'st never hear the particulars about Bankes and his famous horse?"

Blanche could not in conscience go the length of a verbal denial; but put on the proper look of curiosity.

"I went to see 'un," continued the knight, "in the late queen's days: there we had heaven knows who, all assembled in Gracious Street; all sorts and ranks o' people; and among 'em, that noted funny fellow, Tarlton, as you've heard on over and over again. So the horse, he tells what o'clock it was, and guesses at our ages, and picks folk's pockets, and this,

that, and t'other; the wonderful'st tricks that ever was seen. Now Tarlton, he gives the wink to them about him; 'and,' says he, 'I've a favour to beg o' you, Master Horse: I'd fain see thy owner, one Bankes, a little bit closer. Pray drag us out the verriest knave in company.' And what d'ye think happened of all things in the creation? Why, the horse lays a tight gripe upon Tarlton himself, by the collar of 's doublet, and lugged the poor unhappy jester into the middle, shaking and towsling him till he were o' the point to be choked outright; and such a shouting and storming, and clapping o' hands: bless my stars!"

The girls laughed as heartily as they had done the first time the story was told.

"Oh, father, we must see him," cried Elinor; "you must and shall take us to this horse; it doesn't signify talking."

"And so I will, my little darling; troth will I, as soon as any thing else. Hollo, though, stay; there be two points against it. I'm afear'd all this was twenty years back.

Another matter's still worse; for Master Bankes must needs take his beast over to foreign parts, and pick up a little money so. But he'd better ha' staid where he was: they laid hold o' un, I think, in Portugal or Spain, or some popish places o' that kind, and burnt 'em, he and his horse together, for a couple o' sorcerers. Never thee mind, Elinor, we'll ha' quite enough to see, and enough to do. You'll be able to travel to-morrow, young ladies. Easy work now; so get ye gone; get ye gone; high time ye were all a-bed."

CHAPTER VIII.

While this innocent and affectionate party were on their road next day, between St. Alban's and London, and about to enter the city from the north side; Lord Alfreton, Mondomer, and James Stanley left the Westminster extremity of it, in an exactly opposite direction. They crossed the Thames, horses, servants, and all, at a ferry near Westminster Hall; and before they had landed, another boat conveyed Stanley, the father, to the same point, from a farther distance down the river. They were all in full march for the house of the latter; and a kind and hearty greeting ensued; when the general (who, for a well-bred man, was somewhat stately for the most part) assumed a peculiar warmth in his address to Hugh, the considerate delicacy of which was duly appreciated.

They turned upon their right into some

narrow and dirty lanes, between fields but lately reclaimed from a morass, and at length issued from the mass of dank willows and alders that obstructed their prospect, in full view of the archbishop's palace, of which they were then a good deal to the south-west.

"Now I think of it, Lord Mondomer," said James Stanley, "just thereabouts are the stairs where you embarked after the last visit you were kind enough to favour us with: did Geoffrey prove a trusty guide?"

"As far as he went," replied Mondomer, who relished but little the recollections connected with that subject: "when the storm — you remember the night turned out sufficiently bad — when the storm came on he returned, and was very wise in so doing; but gave me good directions before he left me."

"Ah, Mondomer," said the other, "you're for letting him off smoothly I surmise. Now tell me fairly, was he not in too great a hurry to get back, or hadn't you some dispute?"

"No, I give you my word, if you mean angry contest: he, indeed, pressed me to re-

turn with him, which I was averse to; but nothing the least like a quarrel. Why should you suppose so?"

"Only because he came home in such an infernal ill-humour; I thought he'd have snapped my nose off for merely saying I hoped he had not left you alone among those intricate lanes, for fear of a wetting."

Hugh now looked to the plantations on his left hand, and made signs to Alfreton, who gazed upon them with curiosity and awe, but, of course, could distinguish nothing as they rode along. On the first opportunity that occurred, produced by a narrow lane which obliged them to separate into pairs, Lionel went on first with James Stanley, and, in a low voice, so as not to distress his friend, commenced a course of pumping James about Forman, his residence in that vicinity, and all the reports that prevailed concerning him. Meanwhile the general had joined Lord Mondomer.

"I took no part," said he, "in those questions that my son, I fear, was troubling your lordship with a few minutes ago; but,

upon reflection, think it better to apprize you of all we know, as the hostility between your relation and her former associates is a matter, unhappily, of notoriety. My dear lord, they have the king with them completely, and 'tis a painful duty to inform you that —— that —— there is scarce any evil of which they scruple to accuse the baroness."

"I did imagine so," returned Hugh.

"Has your lordship any notion of the particular imputations cast upon the lady?"

Mondomer intimated, by a movement of the head, that he had.

"My son," resumed the general, "acted becomingly just now, in ceasing to keep up a conversation which you gave no countenance to; but his object, I have not the shadow of a doubt, was to discover whether, during that night in the summer, you had seen or heard any thing of a certain dark and odious being, who, at that time, was established hereabouts."

"And is he not so now?"

"I perceive, my Lord Mondomer, and am glad to do so," returned Stanley, "that the

malignant rumours current of late will not come entirely by surprise upon you. The fact is, from my second son, Geoffrey, we did collect that the wretch Forman had been seen by you, though at some distance from his own abominable seclusion. May I ask, if you again overtook him? or have any reason whatever to suppose you saw him during the tempest that succeeded?"

"I might, perhaps, have a glimpse of the same figure that Geoffrey pointed out,—I believe I might, but not close—not so as to make any observation upon him, you may depend on it. Now, General Stanley," continued Hugh, with the manner of one who conquers his embarrassment by main force of resolution, "you are certainly right in supposing I shall not be overset by surprise at least; whatever may be told to me of my unfortunate relation. But the particulars of the breach between the Lady Essex and herself, I am altogether ignorant of, and should be glad if you would be pleased to explain them."

"That task is beyond me, my good lord, although I undoubtedly witnessed the meeting of these ladies, after the first return of the latter to Westminster. It happened at Arundel Palace, where were assembled the Countess of Essex, many of her relatives, and others of high rank, generally speaking. The Lady de Lyle came in late, and approached her friend with the confidence that was usual — that we should all have expected. It is impossible to describe to you, my lord, the remarkable gestures of the countess upon this occasion — she changed colour and drew back; more like a child in presence of a harsh parent, or vassal abashed before an angry superior, than any thing else I could compare her to. Then, having secured my Lord of Suffolk's arm, again she came forward, like the same child encouraged to be pert by assurances of protection. What she uttered was quite unintelligible, and consisted, as it would seem, of hint and inuendo, accompanied by a shrill spiteful laugh that was frightful to hear, and reminded one of insanity. A few stern words

from her former friend once more overpowered the young fury; she shrunk back terrified and speechless; she cast her eyes upon the ground, and a burst of tears would doubtless have followed, had not Lord Rochester come up just then to her assistance. The scene now became excessively distressing: never, my good young friend, never will I believe, without the most absolute demonstration, the imputations which, after that, could no longer be mistaken. The abhorred name of Forman was unsparingly made use of, while——".

"Enough, sir," cried Hugh; "I can anticipate all you have now to relate. But did she—I would say—was there any retort? any attempt at recrimination?"

"The baroness, my lord, replied not but by look of scorn, and, perhaps some short expressions of the same feeling, where an interval was allowed: for, backed by the Lord Rochester, and supported by many of her own family, the younger lady had now the advantage, which she unsparingly pursued 'till the Lady de Lyle departed; but with an air

as haughty and unbending as has been always habitual to her."

"And did you not," said Mondomer, "collect from whence the immediate cause of all this virulence had arisen?"

"No, I think not—and yet, to say the truth—something was obscurely thrown out of a dreadful occurrence in the autumn, as I think; and the words falsehood and hellish fraud were perpetually vociferated; but what the transaction might be, or how the Lady de Lyle was concerned in it, did not appear."

By this time the party had arrived upon a fair open lawn, commanding a prospect down an extensive reach of the river, then at flood tide; with the stately villas, amounting to palaces, of many of the principal nobility, and rich plantations encroaching even upon the water, on the northern bank; and the seat of General Stanley, to which they were all bound, in full view on the southern. Alfreton and James, yet in deep conference, were proceeding some thirty yards in advance of the others, and Mondomer had proposed to over-

take them, that they might all get up to the gate together; but the general still detained him.

"I have only one additional fact to mention, my lord: you inquired whether that wretched being had forsaken his retreat near Lambeth?"

"I did so," said Hugh.

"We have the best reasons," added Stanley, "for concluding this part of the country to have been freed from his hateful presence, almost from the day — there — that day in the summer of which we were speaking. In the first place, the poor, ignorant people of the hamlets around have been less agitated by perpetual causes of alarm from that quarter. Some of them also have ventured, as I understand, to the very spot, (though at what period of the twenty-four hours, I will not answer for) and found no marks of recent habitation there. What, however, seems most conclusive is, that near the beginning of this month, for three or four nights together, a guard — aye, a considerable effective guard,

was dispersed around as close as could be to the spot. They were to unite at a few minutes' notice; and I happen to know, had positive orders from the highest authority, to arrest whomsoever they might discover, and judge to be there under circumstances of suspicion; nor do I make the least question but Lady Essex and the favourite were at the bottom of this measure."

"It may be so," said Mondomer; "but the original and lamentable intimacy of — of all those three persons, serves to make their whole subsequent conduct inexplicable to me. I know not: things will scarce remain long in this state. Oh, here we are: I well remember those two stone balls at the entrance of your grounds. Many thanks, general, for your information; which, as far as it extends, is most essential to me."

Instead of immediately making for the house, Stanley led them through various courts and gardens, into the meadow between his mansion and the river, apologizing all the way for the absence of this duke, and that baron,

and this minister of state; recounting the various excuses they had sent him, and confessing in the end, that he had nothing more interesting than a family party to meet them.

"And even that," said he, "imperfect; for my nephew, George, wouldn't leave his hunting at the approach of November to ensure all our translation to heaven. Geoffrey, however, I am happy to hear, has laid violent hands upon your brother, my Lord Alfreton."

"And Mistress Alice," said Hugh, "does she remain in the country to enliven Sir George? or is she with you?"

"Surely," returned the general, with a laugh, "your lordship means not to insinuate that upon such a division of the brother and sister, none of us would have any right to complain? Aye, faith, my notable niece is here; and the only female belonging to the house. I wonder whether Geoffrey and Edward have made their appearance?"

"They're making it, sir, at this moment," cried James; "for I'll undertake to swim from hence to Kingston and back, if they are

not figuring off in that boat towards Battersea yonder; and my cousin with 'em."

"Oh! how very silly, at this time of year!" said the general: "but she's well wrapped up, I trust."

The crew and passenger in the boat, it is probable, had by now made a similar discovery with James, (as our friends were close upon the water's edge, on an overhanging bank) and shaped their course accordingly. The tide was against them upon the return; but the youths tugged away manfully, to the blistering and discomfort of Edward Alfreton's hands, who had long been unused to this amusement. On their landing, Alice was really delighted to see Hugh, in whose concerns, as far as they related to the Harlande family, she took a lively interest; and more so, because she alone, of all the party at Belton, had, by the course of accident and some penetration, been let entirely into the secret. It was soon perceived that Alice and Lord Mondomer were upon an extremely good understanding. They had evidently

some topic peculiar to themselves; as far as consisted with good manners, they took opportunities of walking together apart from the rest, and Hugh evinced such manifest animation and pleasure in conversing with her, that the young Stanleys began to wink, and smirk, and say sly things. Their father recollected Mondomer's ready inquiry after his niece, before he had even heard her name mentioned; and settled, that with their contiguous lands in Northumberland, and as the lady was a popular, pretty, and lively woman, the superiority in age of Alice to Lord Mondomer of nearly three years, was not likely to be taken into the account.

At any rate that was Hugh's affair; and the general pronounced, internally, his high approbation of the match, as a suitable, and, indeed, very flattering establishment for his ward.

Edward Alfreton, on the contrary, was forced to exert the most constant watchfulness over himself, for fear of being lowered by the manifestation of ill-humour, which might (he

admitted the possibility) be mistaken for jealousy.

That youth, it seems, notwithstanding his air of universal carelessness, had casually admitted into his mind the idea of many advantages associated with the property of Alice Stanley, which operated with their full weight upon him, not happening to be counteracted by any disinclination to her person.

But to Lionel this unlooked for intimacy proved one unmingled sensation of rapture. It removed the main impediment to his wishes; and he could scarce repress the open avowal, that could he have been offered the disposal of any event calculated to ensure his gratification, he verily believed it would have been impossible for him to have hit upon so exquisitely satisfactory an occurrence.

He was all friendship and regard for Hugh, active politeness for Alice, and complacency for every body else; and, to say the truth, proved exceedingly agreeable, and a great acquisition to the party.

On the second morning, when the rest of the men were betaking themselves to their different pursuits — riding, shooting, or some other out of doors exercise, Lord Mondomer and his friend made pretences of becoming better acquainted with the country about, by taking a walk through the perpetual close foot-paths and shaded lanes, which, at that time, gave to those parts of Surrey almost the appearance of one continued arbour. They declined, therefore, any expedition on horseback; and when left to themselves, found the way without any great trouble, to the desolate scene of Mondomer's former consternation and horror.

"Do you know, Hugh," said Alfreton, as they approached, "I feel some doubts whether one ought to enter a place where such practices have been carried on; and we shall have a very good notion of it from without, shan't we? I don't suppose you mean actually to go in?"

"Why not?" said the other. "General Stanley tells me, it has all been abandoned for

months. And really, if one found (which I don't in the least expect) — but if we were to come across that detested Forman, of whose person I think I have some idea, 'tis far from clear to me that it would not be our duty to seize and deliver him up to justice."

Alfreton remained for a while silent, in visible consternation. Then, with some effort, "If such is your absolute opinion, you may depend upon my assistance; for I have the most unlimited confidence in you, Mondomer. And you have no doubt taken into consideration such — any — how — how others may be affected by his apprehension."

"Scarcely any subject besides has occupied my mind since our arrival at Westminster. My dear Alfreton, there is one thing to be done, and one only: she must quit England without loss of time; her life's in hourly danger. And to you it would be absurd to deny my certain fears that proof sufficient will appear of her participation in deeds, that our nature most recoils at. Would to Heaven I knew where she might be found! I have sent

in search of her in every imaginable direction. 'Tis possible, after all, that she may already have left the island; and security from the last vengeance of the law seems all that now can be looked to."

They were about half way down the avenue, and approached the wretched dwelling before them, not without frequent palpitation of the heart, as well on the part of Mondomer as his companion. But nothing appeared at all inconsistent with the account given by General Stanley: the casements were open, the door unfastened, for even the single latch was out of order; and on their entrance, a general aspect of desolation alone presented itself. No furniture: a pile of bricks that had fallen from the ceiling lay heaped in one corner of the only room contained under the roof; and in another part, a quantity of straw.

"The place has plainly been deserted for a long while," observed Alfreton; "and most likely will ever remain so. See, the wainscot even has been broken up for fire-wood."

"This is clean straw, however," said Hugh,

turning it about with his stick, "and looks to me as if somebody had lately lain upon it."

"That may be," replied Lionel; "some poor homeless wanderer, I suppose. 'Twould be nearly as much against the grain with me to sleep in this hut, as to pass the night in the pond yonder. But cold — pinching cold and necessity. Well, are you satisfied?"

Hugh answered in the affirmative; and they got back barely in time to make some alteration in their attire before dinner was served.

"You have been inquired for, my lord," said Geoffrey, as he met Mondomer on the stairs, but continued to descend so quick as to cut off all reply. When our friends came down, the whole company were on the point of moving into the hall.

Lord Alfreton was placed at the right hand of the young lady, Hugh on the other; the rest took their seats promiscuously.

"I must say, gentlemen," observed Alice,

"that you are the very patterns of courtesy and chivalry: to detain men from their morning's diversions would be, I am well aware, a most presumptuous expectation; but really when two gallant cavaliers excuse themselves from riding, expressly on the ground that they can see the immediate neighbourhood better on foot, it did occur to me that I might have had the choice offered me at least, of accompanying them. Indeed I frankly own my conceit in imagining that one of the two had adopted the plan very much for the sake of my society and conversation."

"The omission to profit by it," said Hugh, "was, I admit, most disgraceful, most inexcusable; and the worst of it is ——."

"How do you know, my Lord Mondomer," cried Alice, laughing, "that my remark was meant to apply to you?"

"I have not the vanity to take it to myself; but if you had permitted me, Mistress Alice, I should have attempted some excuse for both of us."

"I say the less in the way of apology," observed Lionel, "because 'tis pretty evident that one of us sits with his pardon ready made out. But I give you my honour, Mistress Stanley, I heartily repent the having any hand in seducing Mondomer away; it was very wrong and inconsiderate, certainly."

"I protest," said she, turning to Alfreton, "you are not the same man that I met lately in the north. Last night, you were all life and fire; and you say civil things to one now with something of a sprightly turn. What was the matter with you at Belton?"

"Matter with me? I thought it a remarkably pleasant visit."

"Nay, but you were very absent and odd there: you know you were. We all observed it."

"You all did me too much honour," returned Lionel, no little annoyed by this; "I should have supposed you were better entertained and employed than in taking notice of me."

"Oh dear, no," said the lady: "people

never notice us when we are laying traps for notice; but when we flatter ourselves with escaping observation, they always do. You've no conception how you amused old Sir Giles!"

"Amused, madam?" cried Lionel in dismay.

"Yes, I'm positive he thought you were in love."

Alfreton twisted about, in excessive discomposure, and completely out of countenance.

"A few weeks only," said Mondomer, who likewise had his objections to this topic, "will frequently change a man's entire character; his whole deportment at least, at our time of life. I am experienced enough to have ascertained that in several instances. The going abroad, I think, will commonly do it."

"I have known a man alter," observed Edward Alfreton, "from one of the most shy and reserved persons I was ever in company with, to quite a flirt, thinking he makes an impression upon every woman he meets."

"And I," cried Alice, "have seen people

who never altered at all in their progress through life; though every body else thought it would have been as well if they had."

"In what latitude did your honours stroll this morning?" said Geoffrey across the table to Mondomer.

"Through some of those lanes that you led me into, one evening in last July."

"What a night that turned out," continued Geoffrey: "but you were resolved to go on; and where there's a will, there's always a way."

"You found your way back, I think," said James.

"Bless me!" cried Alice, "I had an adventure this morning. See what comes of being left without protectors. I was accosted by a madman, with a tattered rug round him in place of a cloak."

"Aye, that puts me in mind, Lord Mondomer," interrupted Geoffrey; "I didn't think it worth while to detain you when we passed upon the stairs; but that fellow asked after you: he did, I assure you."

" Tell me," said Hugh, " what you know of him.

" Nothing at all: he was prying about the place in an extraordinary kind of way; and when I found that he'd actually terrified my cousin nearly into fits ——."

" No, Geoffrey, no; its false, I protest and declare," cried she.

" I'll be hanged if he didn't," said the other: " I thought it high time to lay hands upon him; so he was brought into the butler's pantry, and examined. We could get nothing out of him, however, but, ' I knows my Lord Mondomer is hereabout.' And sometimes 'twas, ' My young master;' and he wanted to speak with you, he said, and with no one else."

" What became of him?"

" Oh, we gave him some meat and drink; a poor, half-witted creature! and sent him away after his own business; but warned him not to keep idling about these grounds."

" Did he say where he came from?"

"Not he."

"I wish you had kept him till we returned," observed Hugh.

"I rather wish they had," said the general, as the men rose, upon the young lady's departure from the room.

CHAPTER IX.

The temptation to tease Alfreton about the Belton girls assailed Alice with very considerable force during that evening, and on many occasions in the course of the day following; but she resisted it, seeing that his confusion and embarrassment had amounted to positive pain; and likewise upon consideration that such diversion would really be ill-natured, as her opinion was decidedly made up upon the true state of Blanche's affections.

"So far, then, all was straight and intelligible," said she to Mondomer, while they were taking a walk in the plantation by themselves. Hugh had already made her his complete confidant, as to every thing that related to the Harlandes.

"It is vastly kind of you, Mistress Alice," replied he, "to take such a concern in my happiness, and suffer me to talk to you upon

this subject, on which I never before could expatiate freely to any one."

" It diverts me," said Alice, " and I've a notion I may be of use to you both. Observe — Blanche Harlande has confessed nothing to me; I proceeded merely upon my own observation. But from what you now say, and I am convinced that (very delicately and properly to be sure) you have not related the whole of your encouragement; no doubt remains on my mind of some base stratagem having been put in practice, with a design of separating you for ever. Lay your hand upon your heart, Lord Mondomer, and tell me whether you know any person likely to have been engaged in such a plot."

" I think I do," he replied; " but the motive for that conduct I can by no means adequately comprehend."

" And you are indisposed to inform me further as to your conjecture?"

Hugh looked upon the ground.

" Be it so," said she; " but you have already told me you had one letter from

Belton subsequently to your arrival in London last June: did you write in return? I need scarcely ask it."

"Frequently — urgently — with unabated affection—entreaty—astonishment—and remonstrance; but never was indulged with another line."

"Not lukewarm and variable answers," observed the lady, "but none at all! The one you did receive; was that kind as you could expect?"

"To the full. So distant a correspondence (as the public post is now conducted) we all know to be extremely precarious; and I might perhaps have attributed my disappointment entirely to that circumstance, but for after events, which put the estrangement of my friends' hearts from me beyond all question. Hastily — I fear peevishly — I gave a promise to my uncle that nothing should induce me to leave Mondomer for Belton, before he followed me into Northumberland."

"Your late uncle," said Alice, "was incapable of any foul underhand dealing—

unless I ever greatly misunderstood his character."

"I am persuaded of that: I do not entertain a doubt of it," continued Hugh; "but at that moment he seemed averse, though not violently so, to my contracting any engagement. Now I protest to you, by all my hopes of future happiness, that the slights I had experienced by no means deterred me from continued efforts at explanation, after my arrival in the north. Another long and melancholy detail was written, containing a full statement of all I had previously done — all the grievous vexation I had endured — and only beseeching her, if she cast me off for ever, to give me some reasons for her resolution. This last letter, to make every thing sure, was entrusted to my own man — to the domestic immediately about my own person — to —— hah!" he cried with so sudden an exclamation as made Alice start, "Stone — aye — Edward Stone — the whole may yet be accounted for! Heaven above! how was it that I never saw through this before?" He

walked to and fro in a tumult of agitation, forgetful of the lady's presence, and uttering in disjointed sentences, " The ungrateful, treacherous villain! —Oh! every means had he — all passed through his hands — basely corrupted and ruined poor wretch! — aye, aye, in London as well as elsewhere — all that I should have received, as well as the letters I sent." — Then turning short upon Alice — " How unlucky — how beyond conception unlucky at this moment, their not having stopped him yesterday! —— Oh! I beg ten thousand pardons, Mistress Alice; but your goodness, I well know, will allow for these moments of distraction upon such a discovery; for a great discovery I make no hesitation in calling it!"

" No, go on," said she, " ramp and rave about a little more, and when you have exhausted all that sort of thing, perhaps you will condescend to explain to me — as much as you shall judge prudent."

" I am calm, quite calm now, my kind friend; I have the strongest grounds to believe that my own servant, the only one, during my

uncle's life, who could be called so, has been suborned to betray me, and suppress the whole of our correspondence on both sides; for I am positive that my letters were all entrusted to him to be forwarded to their destination, and that he was usually, I believe invariably, despatched for such replies as I was in expectation of. Ask me not with whom this scheme of iniquity originated, I beseech you."

"And you are in truth persuaded," said Alice, "that this abrupt interruption to your correspondence was solely sufficient to produce all the misunderstanding and distress that I witnessed, on an occasion which you perfectly remember?"

"The more I reflect, the more I am convinced of it."

"Stay an instant," cried she; "what might you mean by lamenting their not having stopped somebody? Who? Do you allude to any one hereabouts?"

"I do."

"Surely not to the maniac, about whom

we talked while we were at dinner yesterday?"

"Very probably," said Mondomer, "as my imagination is now highly excited, I may rush on a great deal too rapidly to conclusions, but I take him to have been no other than Stone, the man of whom I was speaking; I do indeed, and would give the universe for an opportunity of ascertaining it. His appearance, according to your description, agrees with what I myself saw of him not long ago."

As they returned towards the house, Mondomer explained the state in which he had overtaken Stone on the night of his arrival at Westminster, and the promise of the latter to give him another meeting, which had not been kept.

"The rise of dawn," said Alice, "I do actually think begins to glimmer upon your clouds and darkness: but stop, have you made no attempt at reconciliation since that man left you?"

"None," replied Hugh quickly; "I still thought it hopeless. I own to you moreover,

that the unkind usage I had been treated with determined me to resist any inclination of the sort, cost what it would."

"Well done pride," said the young lady; "rather than offend thee, comfort and felicity are sacrificed as a matter of course; but my good Lord Mondomer, do you march off and consider what's to be done: I shall be laughed at beyond all endurance if we're so constantly together."

Before Hugh had come to any definite resolutions beyond that of despatching a special messenger immediately to Belton, nearly four hundred miles off, with such an epistle as was never before composed, for clearness, candour, and tenderness; one of his own grooms came running to meet him, with a dirty scroll of paper in his hand, addressed, as far as the address was intelligible, to Mondomer himself. This, as the man who brought it declared, had been given to him, while exercising his lord's horses near the house, by a strange ragged looking fellow, who took himself off, as the narrator expressed it, immediately after.

He begged and prayed me to lose no time in bringing it to your lordship."

"Did you," said Mondomer, interrupting, "see the person who loitered about this place all yesterday morning, and was afterwards brought in and questioned somewhere among the servants' offices?"

"No, my lord, can't say as I did, only heard 'em a talking on't; but I'll tell you what, your lordship, I've a bit of a notion I knows who 'twas give me this here paper but now."

Hugh's eye glanced eagerly upon him.

"I thought, for all his whimsical tattered kind of dress, from the very first, thinks I, I've seed you somewhere or other, my man; and when he spoke, your lordship, bless ye! the voice I was quite morally certain on. If it warn't Ned as lived with us up to my late lord's bury'ng, I'll eat him. It's a marvellous thing, now, that a fellow in such a place as his'n, with——"

Hugh gave him a look at the commencement of these detached moral reflections, which induced him to omit, or, at least, suspend

them, 'till in the servants' hall he found a much more grateful and willing audience.

The writing proved just legible, but, as might be supposed, villanously spelt and put together. Its import, however, was sufficiently momentous, and to this effect:— "You have been warned once already that you are in danger, and now the blow's on the point to be struck. The old work of hell will begin again to-morrow night, and in the old place. For that, you must ask where one Forman lived; then come upon 'em suddenly and softly, after nine at night. Seize 'em — never mind who it may turn out to be — seize them, and burn all their devilish implements, as you value your life."

Without delay, this document was imparted to Lord Alfreton, and he strongly counselled the propriety of making General Stanley acquainted with it; but to such proposal Mondomer showed an invincible disinclination, and at last fairly owned, that if they could not so act as to avoid the open arrest and consequent inevitable destruction of one of the

parties; he, for his part, would not stir in the matter, whatever might be the result.

"But, my dear Hugh," said Alfreton, "your own safety requires it."

"I cannot, and will not consent to any measures so public," returned the other: "I will go armed, and alone. See her I must, to declare — to force her upon flight from the country; to declare to her the probability, the hourly increasing probability of her ignominious death."

"Alone you shall not go," replied Lionel, "while I have the power of serving and accompanying you: that's a point not to be questioned. But do think better of it, pray, Mondomer. At any rate let us take James Stanley with us; he knows all — that is — more than you imagine: I am clear of it by his conversation on the road hither."

"Oh, no, no; 'twould be too much, unreasonable to require it of him."

"Will you allow me," said Alfreton, "after swearing him to secresy, to confide to him the fact of your having received that writing?"

" As you please then: James may be trusted, I have no doubt. We'll talk more of this — to-morrow night — aye, night! We must absent ourselves, you observe, at a very unusual hour."

" True!" said Lionel, as they entered the house; for evening was far advanced, and it had been dark some time. They found the rest assembled in a warm, elegant, and well-lighted saloon: the general writing, Geoffrey turning over a book of pictures, and the two others listening to Alice, who was attempting to make out a song, accompanied by the lute, which one of the Lady Alfretons had sent her from Turin.

" Oh, very fair! very fair! but you won't have patience," said her cousin James.

" This is highly delightful, I dare to say," observed the lady, " if one could hear it performed as your sisters have done, to give me the style of the air a little."

" Nay, once more, Mistress Stanley," cried Edward Alfreton, " I hate professors of music, with their tricks and affectations:

besides, I've my doubts whether Beatrice or Sophia ever did hear it to more advantage: they could neither of them have got through it half so well themselves, that I'll vouch for."

The lady made another attempt; but on striking a false cord, lifted her hand, as if to beat the instrument in a fury; and then dashed at once into the heart of some common English provincial tune, declaring, as she finished, that Europe could not produce such another composition; and she gave it a decided preference to any thing else that had been popular, since King David took the harp in hand.

"That girl," observed the general, rising and coming forward, "is seldom behind the rest of the world in spirits; but to-night, I think, she even outdoes herself. What did your friend tell you, Alice, that has made your heart so light?"

"She was very sorry to have missed seeing you, sir, I assure you," returned the damsel.

"Who are you talking about?" said Geoffrey..

"Lady Græme has been here, I understand," said the general; "she took the southmost road in her way into Hampshire."

"How? of the Netherbie Græmes?" Alfreton inquired.

"Even so," rejoined Alice; "and such a piece of news has she told me! as — as — I shall communicate to none of you in the first place; and shall be obliged myself to go into London and inquire about, immediately after breakfast, in the second."

"No harm has befallen any of her Cumberland neighbours?" cried Hugh and Lionel, both at once.

"Nothing more than that one Sir Giles Harlande's house, near Lannercost, has been plundered, and all the family carried prisoners into Scotland. Bless the men! I wish any body would be as constantly on the watch to inquire after me with such solicitude. No: Lady Græme has not been in Cumberland for this month and upwards."

All entreaties, sarcasms, and contrivances, to discover what possible event could have put

her so much upon the alert, were baffled by Alice through the remainder of the evening; and she maintained her ground (not without occasionally carrying the war into the enemy's country) till bed-time.

Lionel Alfreton found early means of speaking to the elder of the Stanley youths; and James, as the other had expected, was powerfully struck with the information, and much gratified at the confidence which Mondomer was disposed to place in him.

After some consideration, he gave entirely into Hugh's feelings; agreeing that the secret should be no further extended, and professing his readiness to share the adventure with them.

"Though I admit to you freely, Lord Alfreton, that I had rather engage in any other service, however perilous, than this, in which probably there may be no great danger after all; but don't tell Mondomer so; I've much regard for him—the highest opinion too, and am resolved to go through with it. I honour you also for your friendship, as I'll

be bound you feel pretty much like myself."

"Ah, we won't say much about that," replied Lionel; "and as you observe, one's dread may be merely ideal. But I tell you, James, it strikes me that we might have help at hand, and Mondomer know nothing of the arrangement whatever."

"Certainly,—oh, yes, surely. Now I have a trusty fellow in my eye; one who has served many a campaign with my father; and he shall be within call, at the head of that infernal dismal cut-throat row of trees."

They broke off upon seeing Hugh approach; and little now remained to be settled. As soon as breakfast was over, and Alice, with a becoming escort, had set forward upon her expedition, our three friends acquainted the master of the house with their intention to be absent the whole day, shooting. They should probably, it was added, beat into the woods as far off as Streatham, or beyond it, put up with what refreshment they might get in any of the villages thereabout, and only hoped

he would not expect them back long before supper. With his accustomed politeness, the general begged that while they remained with him their own accommodation and amusement might be alone considered, and acquiesced in their plan for the day's employment.

The three companions were clad in shooting dresses, and till long after they had turned their backs upon Stanley's dwelling, it was not discovered that they had taken no dogs with them.

CHAPTER X.

The morning was dry, though cloudy: a pretty sharp frost had occurred in the night between the second and third of November, and the ground was yet hard. Our youths rambled for several hours, keeping up a desultory conversation, but hardly ever touching upon the great business in hand; whether it was that they determined to spare Hugh's feelings, or conceived that enough would be said about it when the day declined. They strolled to the southward at first, in the exact direction that had been mentioned at setting out, and were nearly bewildered in the mass of wood which at that period covered all the country toward Mitcham, Streatham, and those parts. Apprehensive at length of wandering till they got too far from their ultimate destination, they held a council of war in a grove of chesnut trees; and returning by a straight lane, which, as appeared by the tre-

mendous cart-ruts, made some pretensions to be called a road, arrived upon a fair open plain, situated on a gradual but considerable rise, and terminating towards the north-east in a village. Here their attention was attracted by a lone hedge ale-house, which bore the sign of the Cardinal's Hat, pleasantly situated in a wilderness of luxuriant shrubs and evergreens, with a piece of water in its front and tufted knoll of an island therein.

James Stanley stated his decided opinion to be in favour of taking their dinner there, in preference to the village beyond; and was about to enforce it with much strength and eloquence, when the others spared him that trouble, by expressing the most entire unanimity.

However rude their meal might have been, and we have reason to think toasted cheese and ale formed by far the most luxurious part of it, the three friends enjoyed the blaze of an exhilarating fire of underwood; and after ordering some aqua vitæ and other necessary articles—"It has been often said," observed

Mondomer, as he mixed them up together, "that there is perhaps no man living from whom one may not learn something. While you kept your room, Alfreton, at that Thistle and Crown place, I was delivered over, you know, bound hand and foot, to my Lord Nortonborough's society for the whole evening."

"And from him," said Lionel, "you acquired the art of brewing that beverage. Well, I should certainly have named him, otherwise, as an unquestionable exception to your remark."

"Now taste it — taste it — don't be unjust towards the earl. . . .

Oh! this is beyond Nortonborough," said Alfreton.

"Far beyond his native capacity, to be sure," cried Stanley; "but still, as he seems to have caused its introduction here, let him have the credit of it with us. We shan't easily pitch upon any other of his merits."

"I suspect this is stronger than it seems," said Lionel: "be cautious, Mondomer, we

have need of all our faculties — our senses, at any rate."

"The day grows dim already," observed Hugh; "but that 'tis so very early for it, I should think there was snow in the air. Stanley!"

"Go on, I am attending," replied James.

"We shall hardly move from hence 'till many hours after dark; are you sure you shall be able to find your way at that time?"

"Very confident: I feel far less doubt about that than the truth of that lunatic's miserable scroll. After all, Mondomer, we are acting upon slight information enough."

"Has Alfreton told you, James, who that miserable object was? I more than suspect him to have been a former attendant of my own, and one in whom I placed great trust too — indeed did I — very great."

"Aye? if so, that makes a difference," said the other; "but I hardly know how you mean to proceed."

"It shocks me—it pains me to enter upon particulars: but really the main desire of my

life now, is once more only to meet—to see—you know whom—to save her—to secure her escape—to give her time for repentance."

"And as for the other," said James, "he I mean who has already given this country an ill name; you have no mind to favour his escape from justice, I presume?"

"The proceeding," replied Hugh, "is full of difficulties and embarrassments: I will be ruled, in case of the worst we dread, by your opinions altogether. If he makes resistance, and I have reason to deem him capable of it, ——"

"He must take the consequence," said Alfreton. "One would cut down a monster of that stamp with as little repugnance as brush off an insect that tormented us."

Here there was a silence of very considerable duration, each sitting absorbed in his own reverie. Then some topics of general conversation were started, but though suggested and replied to mechanically, the efforts became wandering, unsteady, and excited no interest; and certain truisms were broached, which the

most perverse and petulant sceptic that ever existed might have been defied to contradict with the shadow of plausibility.

"I met with a man," said James Stanley, "in the course of the autumn, who has been two voyages to the Spanish West Indies."

"Did you?" said Alfreton. "I wonder whether we shall have a moon any part of to-night?"

"Well," cried Hugh, "and what sort of an account did your friend give of the New World?"

"Oh! he was free and communicative enough: hot, I think he said it was; uncommonly so."

"I should suppose you might have picked up some exceedingly curious information from him."

"Surely," said James, "surely: he seemed a modest, sensible man."

"Did he tell you much," observed Lionel, "of the natives? their horrid, savage rites, war-hatchets, dancing, and cannibalism?"

"I think he did," returned James, "some-

thing or other. Infernally hot, he said it was; I'm positive of that."

"You told me, gentlemen," said the master of the house, who entered at this moment, "I was to let your honours know when 'twere half past seven, but we've no time-piece or nothing here, and I'm afeared the hour's gone by."

Hugh started up! "Then how late do you take it to be?"

"Why, they tell me, sir, that the clock at the great turreted house up east-way yonder, what overlooks the river, has gone eight some time, and when the wind sits fair, we always hear him plain enough."

"Don't be uneasy," observed Stanley, "the distance is nothing to mention. After nine, I think, was the expression in that obscure warning."

The landlord was paid and dismissed.

The three companions remained for a while deep in consultation, round the grateful fire, and quitted it at length by a resolute and

spontaneous movement, though with something approaching to a pang, on the part of Alfreton and James Stanley. It wanted but few minutes of nine when they left the cabin: the night set in cold and cheerless; there was a moon indeed, but her beams were feeble, flitting, and, every now and then, totally obscured by the agitated clouds. The wind rustled amid the few autumnal leaves that were yet remaining, and sighed sullenly, as if giving indication of some greater commotion in reserve.

Our friends proceeded steadily, but with not much rapidity; and so long was it before they arrived at a spot they were acquainted with, that Mondomer felt some doubts whether Stanley had not misled them. In fact that was partially the case; for without the slightest disingenuous intention, the judgment of the youth was somewhat impeded, either by the obscurity of a sufficiently inconvenient night for their purpose, or by the conflicting sensations in his own breast, which were certainly

not inconsiderable. But he meant honourably, and used his best endeavours to guide them.

" The way is longer than I had any notion of," said Alfreton.

" Oh ! Stanley, Stanley," cried Hugh, " this will never do ; why, you're crossing into a field."

" To be sure I am," said James, rather impatient at his own blunders ; " we were too far to the left — follow me — never mind the path. Do you see that high black mark that bounds the next meadow but one to this ? Ah ! the moon's failed again —follow me, however. By all that's sacred, I believe the line I pointed out was the great yew hedge belonging to the avenue."

" Look, look !" cried Lionel ; and a light at that instant was distinguishable, by which they saw clearly enough, a part at least, of what resembled the avenue certainly. That was the point they were to make for, and Mondomer redoubled his pace, while Stanley whispered to Lionel : —

" 'Tis Philip; you remember he was to meet us, according to your suggestion."

This comfortable intelligence gave new vigour to Alfreton. They all pressed on; waded a ditch that might almost have been called a river, and found themselves in the grove at the head of the shaded walk, and recognised the stagnant canal.

" What a sudden change in the weather!" cried Lionel; " it's as mild as summer!"

" The light has disappeared," said Mondomer; " can you question now the truth? the —the—what's this? Oh! hold, hold—what's the matter with me? Merciful Providence! how ill I am!"

His voice faltered, and the others ran to support him. He trembled exceedingly; cold deadly damps bedewed his forehead, and the chill grasp of his hand, which pressed the first of theirs he could seize with a convulsive gripe, was so alarming as absolutely to bereave them, for the moment, of their natural powers. Philip, who had kept near at hand, came

up with the light, and held it to Mondomer's pallid cheek.

" Lay me on the ground," said Hugh, with difficulty; " I feel myself dying."

He stared upon the stranger, but without expression of surprise, and to the unutterable affliction of poor Lionel, it was soon perceived that his senses were gone, and he lay in a trance.

" Where can we take him? Oh me! do assist me," cried Alfreton: " what shall I — can I do?"

" He still breathes," said Philip: " do you watch him here, Master James; cover him up warm, and put a cloak under him; we must run down to yon hut for help — somebody's there, I am certain — Heaven knows who."

Alfreton dashed, without a moment's consideration, down the avenue.

" No, Philip, no," cried James; " you stay by Lord Mondomer, and I —"

But the man was already out of hearing, and he came up with Lionel as he reached the building.

"My lord! my lord!" cried Philip, holding the other back, "d'ye see that?"

A pale blueish light, mingled with visible steam or vapour, glimmered from all the windows; it could not be mistaken for the effect of a lamp, nor did it resemble the moon-light, of which indeed, at that moment, there was not a particle.

"And as one of ye said, sir," continued Philip, "the air 's got sultry. There 's no air at all, I think."

Lionel, without heeding this, attempted to enter the place, but the door was fastened within. A hideous yell followed his abortive effort to open it.

"D'ye think—d'ye think we had better—stay, my lord?" said Philip, interposing.

"What, you a soldier!" cried Alfreton, in accents of reproach and disdain. The other was nettled.

"Confound the thing," said he, muttering; "I'll outdo this boy however, though the bottomless pit lay yawning before me!" and, being a powerful man, with a kick, to which

he applied the whole strength of his body, he burst the door instantaneously open.

They rushed in, as it flew back with violence to the wall, and stood motionless at the sight that presented itself. The interior of the building shone with the same faint and sickly gleam as had flashed from the casements, though no lamp or torch was discernible. A man and woman fronted them upon their knees; and immediately before those persons stood an immensely tall figure, with his back to the intruders. Lionel endeavoured to rally the thoughts which crowded feverishly and tumultuously upon his imagination.

"See there!" said his companion, grasping him, with a wild laugh or sob, and pointing at the figure, which now turned slowly upon them.

Lionel uttered an involuntary shriek of horror, and the man, Philip, dropped as dead! Alfreton kept his hand before his eyes, and had no power to stir; he felt the cold one moment gathering at his heart, and in the next became adventurous through the courage of

desperation. He advanced a step firmly; his sword drawn in his hand, and his mien and form exalted with the fire of one divinely inspired!

"In the name of the Great Deliverer of mankind," he cried, with a loud voice, "avaunt, ye ministers of Satan! Let the Lord arise, and let his enemies be scattered!"

The building shook beneath his feet; a horrible and overpowering noise stunned and confounded him. He reeled; his senses failed; and he had no distinct conception where he was going, or what was passing around him, 'till he found himself among the trees again where they had left Mondomer. All his friends were standing about, and Hugh with them.

"He 's coming to, he 's coming to, now," said Stanley.

"Where am I?" cried Lionel, "and what have I been engaged in?—Ha!" seeing Philip, "was it not you?"

"We'd as good not talk of that perhaps, just as present, my young lord," said the man;

"and yet, much as I have seen of bravery in battles, in sieges, in skirmishes, and every thing that ever was heard of in war, such bravery as thine to-night I never did hitherto see, so help me Gracious Mercy, when I stand most in need!"

"What, 'tis all true then?" said Lionel, shuddering; "no dream, no illusion?—I really believed (to Philip) you were dead."

"No, my lord, no! I own it to my shame may be, but I couldn't stand the devil himself, in person. I was unnerved like a child, my limbs wouldn't support me."

"And you, Mondomer," continued Lionel; "were you not struck awhile ago by some extraordinary malady?"

"Not more extraordinary, my valuable and excellent Lionel, than my recovery. There has been a tremendous shock of an earthquake."

"And at that exact time," added Stanley, "our friend, Lord Mondomer, breathed freely again, began to speak, and, I flatter myself, is as well now as he was before."

“ Nearly so,” said Hugh.

“ What became of me?” said Alfreton, to the attendant; “ and of those—those ——?”

“ The Lord only knows,” returned Philip; “ I thought the world was at an end; and ’twas a miracle we got out of that hellish hole, with every thing in ruins, and clattering about one’s ears.”

“ Is it beat down to the ground?”

“ Not quite, sir.”

“ One side,” said James, “ is laid as flat as the walls of Jericho, and the whole thrown open to the air in twenty directions. We found you, Alfreton, walking near it, as if nothing had happened; but soon perceived that, for the time, your mind was totally unsettled.”

“ I feel somewhat calm and quiet now, thank Heaven: but still the whirl of a horrid dream seems going on occasionally. What did we see?”

“ That, which I most religiously hope we shall neither of us ever see again, my lord,” said Philip.

Shouts were now heard, and many lights seen approaching, from several points at once. The first groupe of villagers that arrived looked askance at our party; and appeared to be comparing their relative strength with a view to an attack. But in the next moment others came up, some of whom knew Philip, and drew back with awe at sight of young Stanley. At length, the curate of a neighbouring parish, who had been forced from his bed, and compelled to attend a portion of his flock to this well known scene of horror, accosted James; and by him was, in some measure, informed of the frightful occurrences that had taken place. Every one panted to examine the ruin, but not a soul would venture, till the curate went in, accompanied by our friends.

Nothing at first appeared, beyond what Hugh and Alfreton had observed on a former day; but at length, among the rubbish, a large volume was found with strange pictures, and in crabbed and uncouth character. A few mutilated figures were likewise picked up; some of wax, some cast in lead: and from the latter,

the common people ran dismayed, as if they had witnessed a legion of fiends.

"Individuals of our species, I understand," said the clergyman, "were partakers in this act of darkness. Where can they have concealed themselves?"

"Please your reverence," said a fellow half dressed, with his night-cap on, "as Jenkins and me was a crossing the field to get to the lane's end the quicker, we met two evil spirits, like a man and woman; the one in the shape of a man, with an ugly mishaped kind o' bonnet on. They was a quarrelling and raving most violent indeed: and the one in the shape o' the man, says he, 'Our spell, (that 's the word, I'll take my oath, for he said it seven times over at the least), our spell 's destroyed, for ever and ever.' And such abominable, wicked words, gentlemen—."

"Why were they not secured? It was your duty to have apprehended them."

"What! apprehend two devils incarnate," cried Jenkins, "and your reverence not at hand! No, that 'ull never do."

"How came the alarm to be so universally spread, sir?" said Stanley to the minister.

"This detested spot," returned the clergyman, "is but too notorious, and for many a mile the whole order of nature has been deranged to-night. Strange shapes have been seen in the air; the atmosphere, from the freezing point, turned suddenly to close and sickly heat; and the earth rocked, as if proud London's doom was signed, and she might momentarily expect to be overthrown, a desolation and a heap!"

Our companions now cleared themselves from the crowd, and with all the speed they were capable of, made for General Stanley's residence.

"Nothing shall ever persuade me, Mondomer," said James, on their way back, "that you were not affected by some diabolical process, or incantation; and the wondrous manner in which your friend exerted himself, appears at once to have dissipated the charm."

"It was certainly said by the warning

scroll that your life would be aimed at," observed Lionel.

"We shall have many opportunities of conferring together," said Mondomer; "for the present, I am still in some degree disordered, and long for rest."

"It will scarcely be unacceptable to any of the party," added James.

Before they reached the house, they met several bodies of servants and others, with torches and fire-arms, who had been sent out various ways in search of them; and when they arrived, after midnight, the common uneasiness and consternation were not entirely removed, even by that event.

"What, in the name of all that 's wonderful, can have detained you?" said the general. "You look strangely," to Lord Alfreton. "My dear, my dear niece, you see them safe, all of them. Now, go to bed, I desire you, seriously; I will hear no denial."

"Has any thing befallen you?" said she to Mondomer; "have you suffered at all? And

your countenance," to Alfreton, "is astonishingly altered."

"Alice! Alice!" cried the general, impatiently.

"There has been a dreadful calamity," added she, "somewhere or other; we've had an earthquake, such as ——."

"You will offend me extremely, if you do not go up-stairs this instant," exclaimed the general; and, perceiving he was in earnest, the lady repressed her curiosity, and withdrew.

Some information was given that evening, but very imperfectly; and General Stanley felt soon convinced, from the hints of his son, and the utter exhaustion of the other two, that to get them comfortably to bed, was the matter of immediate importance.

By two in the morning, the entire house became tranquil, after such a night of terror, uncertainty and distress, as the family had never before experienced.

CHAPTER XI.

Hugh rose, at a late hour indeed, but perfectly refreshed and restored. Alfreton likewise awoke in health, but having rested indifferently, he felt indisposed to get up. Still weary, he turned himself into a comfortable position between nine and ten in the morning, fell asleep, and remained in that desirable condition for at least four hours undisturbed.

This was the more needful, as during the whole time that the darkness prevailed, the horrors of recollection, and the impression upon his mind of the unutterable spectacle he had witnessed, darted upon his fancy, as often as he closed his eyes; and if wearied nature sunk for a moment in sleep, he started from some shocking dream, in a state approaching to delirium.

The disgrace and danger of the Lady de Lyle were now so universally known, and the

habits of iniquity by which she had maintained her grandeur and affluence, so much the theme of unrestrained conversation, that Alice was astonished at nothing imparted to her by her own woman while dressing in the morning. For whatever point of honour James Stanley might still make of concealing that lady's name as connected with their adventure; Philip, his servant, by no means partook in those scruples below stairs.

In the midst of their general consternation the evening before, enough had been thrown out, to convince that shrewd man, that the Baroness de Lyle (a name abhorred throughout the neighbourhood) was the person they had all assembled in quest of; and, though the agony of the moment prevented him from recognising her in the hut, he well remembered that a female had been present there. This intelligence, we repeat, gave no great surprise to the young lady; in whose mind the author of the breach between young Mondomer and the Harlandes had been before established pretty satisfactorily, however inexplicable upon

some points, such conduct might yét appear. In the course of the morning she found Lord Mondomer sitting alone in the saloon, thoughtful, and sadly dejected:—" To such a friend as Mistress Alice I have no longer any reserve; though, alas! the infamy and ruin of my nearest surviving relation ——!"

" Affect you," said she, " as might be imagined by those who are acquainted with your disposition. But the generality of mankind, in your situation, would be reconciled to any fate that might befall her: and, to say the truth, I should be apt to concur with them myself. Has she not invariably acted as your implacable and unnatural enemy; and that without the shadow of provocation?"

Hugh stared, and answered, with a sigh, " I cannot but suspect it, I confess. Ill-fated, hard-hearted, and unhappy woman, her woeful career is no secret now to any human being. I am confident of it. Your last observations convince me of it."

" To forgive our enemies," said Alice, " is an imperative Christian duty. But I see no

reason why we should make ourselves miserable at the natural consequences brought upon them by their pertinacity in wickedness, calculated to call down a judgment on the very land where it is perpetrated. My Lord Mondomer, that the usual affection of kindred did not subsist between you and the person we are speaking of, is universally well known. It is said too, for somehow or other these things do get about, that you have not been wanting in efforts for her preservation. I more than suspect your yesterday's expedition to have been undertaken with some such view."

"In my present state of discomfort," observed Hugh, "I find myself unfit for society; and by remaining here, one should only throw a damp upon the hilarity of the party. I am already greatly beholden to you, Mistress Stanley; and if you will add the further obligation of making my excuses to your uncle —— ."

"I will not," she cried, with eagerness, "do any such thing. Neither shall you leave us, to indulge in fruitless melancholy.

'Tis positively essential for you to be in company, and exert yourself, at this time above all others. Come, come, do be rational; do be manly, for that's the word of most effect. Do be something as widely different as possible (that is to say) from the inferior creatures of the other sex, who have no souls."

Mondomer smiled.

"There," said she, "you are getting 'good' again, as the nurses have it. And to reward you, you shall be introduced, by and by, to some country friends of mine, who have never been in these parts before."

"Any friend of Mistress Stanley's," returned Hugh, without much thinking of what he said, "I must be proud to be acquainted with."

"Then you promise not to run away?" cried Alice, as she moved towards the door.

"Since you do me the honour to command it," replied Hugh.

Mondomer's spirits were certainly relieved by this conversation; and while walking in the plantation attached to the dwelling, he

reflected with satisfaction upon the truth of what Alice suggested; her knowledge of his worth and integrity having led her to hazard the guess, that Hugh had not remained without exerting himself to reclaim his relative from her desperate and fatal course of life.

Mondomer then thought of the preceding evening's adventure, with very little doubt that he had been practised upon by sorcery. He remembered that woman's threats at their last meeting; and the feeling of indignation, excited by the idea of her participation in such attempts, grew so strong, as to cost him some pains and resolution in subduing the inclination to vengeance.

To get rid of reflexions so unsalutary, he dwelt next upon the extraordinary conduct of his friend, Lionel, the evening before, with all the admiration it merited. From thence, by an easy connexion, he re-considered the circumstances of their first acquaintance, the warmth and candour of Alfreton, their partial explanation upon the road, and the certain

discovery that they had been, indeed actually were, rivals.

To Belton next would have been an obvious and inevitable transition of thought, had not his meditations been interrupted by the sound of female voices conversing at some distance from him. Hugh halted; for on turning a corner in the path, he must unquestionably have met the strangers, by whom he had no fancy for being disturbed. While deliberating whether he should advance or retreat, the discourse of the other party was resumed. Hugh felt a sudden thrill of delight!

"How exactly the voice!" said he to himself: "I should — I declare I should — but the thing's impossible. And after all, imagination goes a great way. Oh, dear, yes; I have often supposed it before — often — and when I came to hear the voice plainly, there was no resemblance in the least."

This settled, he proceeded, in a careless manner; but, for some reason or other, did not decline meeting the ladies. However,

they turned out not to be altogether strangers to him, since, although they had not seen each other for nearly five months, it cannot be supposed he had absolutely forgotten the person of Blanche Harlande; or that of her youngest sister, who accompanied her. Blanche stood, and looked, as if petrified. Elinor screamed. As for Hugh, he seemed to have lost all memory of any thing that had happened since he was last at Belton. With exclamations of rapture and ecstacy, he rushed towards her, seized, and — and —it would be really very unfair to mention all that he might have done in the hurry of the moment.

Blanche freed herself with some difficulty from his embrace, and still uttered not one word. He was then advancing to the youngest.

"No, Hugh," said she, retiring: "no, my Lord Mondomer, I mean. I'm sure my father won't approve of our receiving you, just as if nothing had—had been different between us. You've frightened poor Blanche, or she would have told you so as readily as I

do: this is the oddest thing that ever was. How came you here, Hugh?" And again she fretted at the inconsiderate familiarity of her address.

"Mistress Elinor," said Mondomer, with a smile that he did not attempt to repress, "treats me with great distance and stateliness. I hope for kinder usage from my beloved Blanche, notwithstanding all our mistakes and distresses."

"It is highly natural, I dare say," observed the eldest, with tears in her eyes, "that your lordship should be much altered since we last met. I suppose I ought to have expected it; but you might remember, we know nothing of the world; and if you — if you are laughing at us, and making game of us, it seems to me very — very unkind."

She looked for a moment on the ground, and again resumed, interrupting him as he was beginning to speak; "I give you my most solemn assurance, my lord, that I had not even a distant expectation of finding you here. Mistress Stanley did not think proper

to inform us of it, when she insisted upon our coming. I wish, from my very heart, I wish she had been pleased to do so; for we were contented, and happy enough in our lodging."

"Then, if you had known I was here, you would have staid away, Blanche?"

"I should have done, my Lord Mondomer, what the rest did. But you may depend on it, if we had been told that, we should none of us have come."

"No," said Elinor, "we should have been just as desirous to avoid you now, as formerly we should have wished ——."

"My dear Elinor," said Blanche, "'twill be as well if we endeavour to find my father."

"Oh, no, you shall not leave me so," cried Hugh. "What part of my conduct is it you complain of?"

"Be pleased to let go my hand," said Blanche.

"I can convince you this moment, that I have as much reason to think myself strangely neglected as — as any one of you."

"I have no inclination to talk upon the

subject," she replied. "Let me return to my father; pray do, Lord Mondomer."

"You call me changed," said Hugh, now really alarmed, and sobbing with emotion; "and yet are yourself hard-hearted enough to refuse me a minute's hearing, when we see each other thus unexpectedly, after so long a separation; when I have many griefs, and scarcely any thing on this earth to comfort me but the thoughts of you, whom I love more dearly, more tenderly than ever. You are changed, I think, Blanche, not to hear me at all."

He then released her hand; but she did not attempt to move.

"I wrote to you," said she, gravely, "the very day after you left us."

"And had no answer to that letter?" cried Hugh, with quickness.

"Not a line."

"Will you believe me, when I protest to you, by all my hopes of eternal rest, that thrice I wrote to Belton in reply, during my remaining stay in London; thrice, fully, pas-

sionately, with entreaty for some explanation? Will you believe me when I solemnly vow, that the first was the only letter of yours I have ever received?"

"Yes, I will, my lord," replied the ingenuous Blanche, the flush of hope and joy returning to her cheek; "I will believe any thing you say, when you speak seriously. But how could it be? And then—ah, Hugh, you will not deceive me, I know. But one circumstance there was, so cruel, so bitterly grievous ——."

"Name it, I beseech you!" cried Mondomer.

"How could you send Ned, the old acquaintance of us all, over to Belton, without even a kind message in words, to any individual of the family?"

"That's just precisely what I wanted to hear," exclaimed Hugh. "As sure as we exist at this moment, he had a letter for you about him. Full well do I remember the day: he was charged with the delivery of that alone, and despatched from Mondomer for that sole

purpose under the sun. To the fullest extent it confirms my conjectures, and enables me to satisfy you entirely. My dearest, dearest girl, have patience one instant longer, and learn why I continued to remain at the castle myself; and what my suspicion is respecting the contrivances that have so basely, so barbarously, troubled and perplexed us."

Here Elinor, with tears of joy streaming, came round, and offered him her hand.

"And do you imagine," said Mondomer, "that your airs and dignity are not to be taken down a little?"

"Be quiet, Hugh; be quiet," cried Elinor; "how do you know people mayn't be coming this way from the house. And I'll tell you what, let us walk on, if you've much more to say, or we shall catch cold."

Away they went, in those transports which the fervent feelings of youth can alone experience, and which are wisely denied to maturer years, lest this world should be preferred as the 'continuing city!'

In the mean-time, Lord Alfreton, com-

pletely re-established by his last sound sleep, had summoned his man, and commenced the operation of dressing. James Stanley paid him a visit at this time, and talked over some of the late occurrences.

"You have quite recovered your former looks now," said he; "but there was something exceedingly remarkable in the expression of your countenance last night."

"Tolerably pale, I suppose," said Alfreton.

"No, rather the contrary—heated; but your eye wandered from every place and every body before you, as if you saw constantly something that nobody else could."

"Very probably," returned Lionel, who shrunk from the subject. "What wonders sleep does for us, James! I feel as fresh, and as lively ——."

"I'm glad of it, with all my heart," said the other; "and do work Mondomer up to the same pitch. We've a reinforcement of young ladies, my noble Prince Arthur! An old friend of ours, the father. Nice blooming country girls, just caught."

"Ah, I am but a poor hand at making the pretty to new acquaintances."

"How! new acquaintances?" cried the other; "Geoffrey says he met you in the summer at their own place in Cumberland; and your brother seems hand and glove ——."

"The deuce! you don't say so? Oh, no, no, no — the Harlandes? Upon your soul? Plague take the washing things."

Here his lordship knocked over the ewer.

"Hollo! hollo!" cried James; "you're bewitched still I think. Take care! you're sluicing it all into one's boots: mind, Alfreton, mind. I'll go and get some one to mop it up."

But before he returned, Lionel had sallied forth full-dressed. In the saloon he saw nobody; and in the hall only preparations for dinner, which was particularly late that day, as well for his accommodation, as because Sir Giles Harlande had some business in town to be finished before he came away.

On the grass plat, however, in front of the door, Lionel's eyes were blessed with the vision

of Blanche and Elinor; Hugh having gone round in another direction.

The youngest was in reality excessively delighted to see Lord Alfreton, and Blanche so happy in other respects, that she greeted him with the utmost cordiality, and during the few minutes they sat together in the saloon, talked with such readiness, spirit, and evident pleasure dancing in her eyes, that he thought her more exquisitely captivating than ever, and made no doubt but she thought pretty much the same of him.

Mondomer now entered the room at one door and Sir Giles, with Margaret, at another. The old gentleman's bow was stiff, and (to Alice, who followed him in) beyond conception, ludicrous.

"Your servant, my Lord Mondomer, your servant," said the knight; "didn't know as we were to expect the pleasure of seeing your lordship, 'till we'd got to my friend the general's here."

"Upon my word, sir," said Hugh, "I do not think I ever was so happy to see any body

in my life," taking possession of his hand at the same time, which the other attempted to withdraw, but 'twas beyond his power.

"Oh! your lordship's very good," returned Sir Giles, keeping up, as he conceived, his dignified and very justifiable resentment: "you be become a courtier, I see, already, my lord; now I be just a plain man from the country, and as for 'never being so glad to meet any body before,' why, there—I'm not a going to make fine speeches about that, my Lord Mondomer."

Blanche twitched her father by the cloak, before any one else could witness this unaccountable reception of a young man supposed to be on the most peculiar terms of intimacy with their family, and begged him to retire with her for a moment, as she had something to tell him of consequence.

While they were talking in another apartment the dinner was served.

"My father would be vexed if you did not sit down, sir," said Margaret to General Stanley, the former having already been informed

of every thing by Elinor: " he and my sister may possibly be delayed some little time."

But if all the dishes on the table had been left to freeze, nothing could have induced the master of the house to quit the saloon before the others came back. Nor had he long to wait, if we may judge by the only part of the dialogue between Sir Giles and his daughter that has been handed down to us.

" Art thee satisfied, lass?" said the knight, " that's all I ask. My whole trust, and confidence, and heart, and every thing else, do rest safely upon thy sense, discretion, and all that. Art thee satisfied, Blanche? there's the whole matter."

" Perfectly, sir. I am far indeed from being capable of explaining the entire plot and treachery that we have suffered by, but my mind is at rest, and I feel — Oh, my dear father! I'm afraid I feel rather too happy."

" As for explanations," replied the knight, " if they'd take any time, I be heartily glad you can't get on wi' 'em. What, I say Blanche,

the same honest, open-hearted youth—just Master Hugh again, as in former days?"

"Very much like it, father; I see no difference."

"Oh! girl, girl, thee shouldn't ha' told me all this directly afore dinner, joy takes away the appetite so."

On returning to the company, Sir Giles, without noticing another soul, made straight for Mondomer, and dragged him to a window apart.

"I find, my lord," said he, solemnly at first, "that we ha' been all on us in a sad, terrible misunderstanding, like—you as well as us. Why, bless thy soul, Hugh, I were but cross and hardish to thee up at Otterbourne that day."

"My first and best friend, say no more, and think no more about it."

"Aye, aye; but it's fit one should make some apologizing what ye call; and I must and will do it too; only gi' me a little time."

"Suppose, sir, we put it off 'till after dinner," said Hugh.

"Faith," returned the knight, "I don't know whether 'twont be best."

It is probable that none of the company assembled had spent many happier evenings; some of them indubitably had never before known such unmixed delight.

Among the latter were Sir Giles and his three daughters; for though Margaret had not the lively perceptions of the other two altogether, she doated upon her sister, and never ceased to regret the loss of Hugh's society at Belton.

Alfreton would perhaps have been better pleased, if his established place had not obliged him to sit by the lady of the house, leaving the other side of him to the mercy of chance; however, as Elinor became his neighbour, the one that (except Blanche) he would certainly have chosen; and as he was gratified with the constant sight of Mondomer opposite, in animated conference with Alice Stanley, nothing seemed in danger of going wrong.

He prattled with Elinor, whose vivacity and uncommon lustre of countenance, (for the

nymph, ever very pretty, had improved considerably during the last month or two), charmed Lionel to such a degree, that there were moments when he thought it conceivable that, by common-place observers, her style of beauty might be preferred to her sister's.

CHAPTER XII.

When they had all retired for the night, Mondomer long lay sleepless, his mind occupied by the various, rapid, and tumultuous sensations which the last few days had excited. Heartfelt thanks he returned for the blessings of that evening, and the cheering promises held out to him; but still there was enough of alloy in his reflections to interrupt unmingled felicity, and, among other thoughts that had a tendency to harass him, the recollection of his friend Lord Alfreton's passion for the object of his own affections, proved no little distressing. In one respect, Hugh soon felt and acknowledged his duty to be clear; he had promised Lionel to tell him of it fairly and decidedly, if any obstruction should arise within his knowledge, to the probable success of the other's hopes, and that promise must, beyond all question, be made good to-morrow,

though our hero fell fast asleep in meditating how.

"Why, general," observed Sir Giles, towards the end of breakfast, "you've got a tight, cleverish kind of a place here."

"It has its advantages and defects like other seats, Sir Giles," returned Stanley; "but if you will ride with me some way up the river, to the westward, this morning, I've a notion we may show you some scenery, of course inferior to your northern prospects, you know, but so totally unlike them as to be curious in its way perhaps."

"Aye, let us," said the knight; "I like your fine houses, and cut and trimmed gardens, and sloped, and that, every now and then; and we'll ha' one o' my girls along wi' us: what dost say, Blanche?"

"If you wish it, sir; but really I have not seen my friend, Mistress Alice, for so long —and—"

"O ho!" cried the knight; "what, secrets and tittle tattle, hey? very well."

"Dear me, sir," said Margaret, "let me

be of the party; I should enjoy it very much."

"Shalt go then, lass," returned Sir Giles, "and 'twill be better taking thee than the young one, for Margaret always has her eyes and ears about her, and can see common matters."

"Thank you, father, for disposing of me with so little ceremony," said Elinor.

"And I'll tell ye who else shall go," continued the knight; "my Lord Mondomer here. What an age it be, my dear boy, since thee and I'd a ride together!"

Hugh could not refuse, though the arrangement interfered awkwardly enough with the long interview between Lord Alfreton and himself, that he had previously resolved upon. That, however, might be postponed till the afternoon; and the horses being brought up to the door, away rode the original four who had been selected, followed, shortly afterwards, by Edward Alfreton and the two younger Stanleys.

Lionel now felt that it was not becoming, or perhaps politic, (though he would have

given his ears to have done it,) to join the ladies' society for the entire morning; so he strolled into the very same grove where Mondomer had met the sisters the day before, and reflected upon his situation, without disturbance from one uneasy thought. He fully remembered the frequent dejection of Blanche when at Belton, which he attributed to an occasional pensiveness natural to her disposition — tender and interesting: and her uncommon sprightliness on the present occasion, he decided, without a moment's hesitation, to be the effect of seeing him once more. Nor was that mere vanity, (so Lionel reasoned,) for what else could it be? Mondomer's attentions and attachment to Alice Stanley were unquestionable; and from the way in which he and Blanche had met and conversed together in Alfreton's own presence, it was manifest that at length they were upon an understanding, and considered each other in the light of brother and sister. Occupied with such waking dreams, he had wandered into some meadows adjoining the plantation,

where he found the long grass wet and uncomfortable. There was no path, and he endeavoured, through a short cut, to regain his former walk, by breaking into the corner of an arbour that he well knew communicated with the grove.

The weather was bright, and remarkably mild for November; and Lionel, while engaged in forcing this passage, heard suddenly the voices of several females, who approached the arbour, evidently with the design of entering it. All of them were familiar to him; and one so ravished his ear, that he felt a temptation to commit one of the meanest acts imaginable: no less than that of remaining exactly where he was: in a situation, that is to say, from whence, without the least chance of being seen himself, it was next to an impossibility that a single word of their discourse should escape him. His lordship summoned, without delay, his scattered thoughts to consultation upon this point of casuistry. Conscience would not so much as hear the thing suggested; while, on the

other hand, present inclination made some extremely effective observations. He argued, in the first place, that it was something more than nine thousand to one, that the proceeding would never be known to any body but Lionel's own self.

Secondly, he intimated, that should Alfreton happen to be mistaken in the notion he had embraced of Blanche being favourably disposed towards himself, there was every probability of his overhearing what must set him right upon that subject; and it was highly essential he should be apprized of it.

Thirdly, with great ability, self-will pressed upon his auditor's attention, that if (which was most likely of all) that charming girl had fixed her whole heart and hopes upon him, in the same degree in which he was devoted to her, it would not simply be excusable, but highly considerate, and happily delicate, to procure a confession by these means; unknown to her, and without putting her to the doubt, embarrassment, and agitation of a prolonged courtship. Conscience was now called

back, and asked what he had to say to this logic; and for replying that he never yet heard any thing so contemptible, was straightway dismissed as a churlish positive brute, who decided without hearing reason.

Lionel, trembling with impatience, and a sense, probably, of his own unworthy conduct, now listened with the profoundest attention to those who seated themselves almost close to him, continuing to talk upon what had before engaged their attention: the youth being wedged in among the shrubs at the further corner so very snugly, that he could not only hear their remarks to perfection, but occasionally, through the mass of foliage, now much reduced by the season, had a transient glimpse even of their dresses.

"Your excessive vehemence, my pretty little friend," said Alice Stanley, "has let me into a secret that I didn't even suspect while I was at Belton."

"Yes, yes," replied Elinor, "that 's all very witty, I dare say, and very easily affirmed; but I always did, and always will stand up

for those I like, when they are unjustly attacked."

"How can you be so silly, Elinor?" said Blanche. "What can you possibly know of that young man?"

"Whether I know much or little of him," returned Elinor, "dosn't in the least signify. Your laughing at me about it is quite absurd; for I never said any thing more than this, which I still hold to. His conversation is to me beyond comparison more agreeable than any other person's I ever met with: now that I repeat. It does not, I grant you, amount to much of a compliment, as I know so few young gentlemen of his age."

"You must have been fully gratified then, last night, my dear," observed Blanche; "for I thought you two never would have ceased talking together. I conclude you gave him back that brooch of his, which you brought away from Belton."

"Hey-day!" cried Alice. "Brooch! what's all this?"

"Why, now, Blanche," said the youngest,

colouring, "how could I, in the bustle and flurry; and when, as you know, so many other things ——."

"Upon my word, you should though," cried the other sister. "What your nonsensical motives for withholding it may be, it is impossible he should ever guess. But suppose, my dear — suppose he was aware of your having stolen his property; which is actually the case."

"Oh, Elinor, Elinor!" said Alice, excessively amused; "I never could have suspected this: never, indeed. A poor innocent youth, it seems, comes to your father's house, with valuable trinkets, confiding in the honesty of the family ——."

"Now, be quiet; pr'ythee do," said Elinor, while the others continued laughing; and for a short time the conversation ceased.

"My very dear friend," observed Blanche, renewing the discourse to Alice; "for assuredly you have proved yourself such by me, where, where should I have been but for your kind assistance? Little, it is true, sufficed for

explanation; but without you that explanation might never have occurred."

"Nay, you're as much beholden to old Lady Græme, your Cumberland neighbour, as you can be to me. Her news decided every thing: I never should have heard otherwise that you were all in London. To say the truth, Blanche, I have not merely a very good will for you; but of all things, I like your Hugh Mondomer. Immense friends we have become of late: so much so, that, upon my word, if you are not in some measure jealous, it will be rather mortifying. Well, my dear, when is it to take place though? And why do you not propose my being a —."

"Not quite in such a hurry, Alice," cried Blanche: "though I will not conceal from you, that we have been engaged to each other ever since Hugh left Belton in June; for the wretched intermediate perplexities I mention no more. What do you think, Alice? all the time we were walking yesterday, I was making up my mind to say, that perhaps it was reasonable for him now, in his

great change of situation, you see, to choose anew for himself, and not be bound by any youthful, any former —— You comprehend. But I do protest to you, dear Hugh's manner was so completely the same as ever, that I could not bring myself to say it, for fear of vexing him."

"You must know, my dear girl," said Alice, "I thought, at one time, that his new bosom-friend, his inseparable companion, his friend up in the clouds, (I beg pardon though, Elinor), but I thought the young Marquess of Fairy-land had been setting you up as the goddess of *his* adoration."

"So he certainly did," observed Elinor.

"Oh, no, no," replied Blanche; "those girls merely said it to tease me. Indeed I make no doubt but Hugh has told him the footing we are upon, so prodigiously intimate as they are become, I understand."

"I am heartily glad of it," said Elinor.

"Should Lord Mondomer really have acquainted him with it," observed Alice, "so thoroughly do I comprehend the character of

that gentle shepherd, with his pipe, love songs, blue ribands, and romance, that if he is not at your feet, Elinor, within this fortnight, (for many reasons are there why I have no chance of him), I'll submit to have my little finger cut off."

"Nonsense and stuff!" cried Elinor, very much pleased: "as if a young nobleman, so much, and I will say, however you may laugh, so justly liked and admired, would ever think, for an instant, of a country girl like —."

"Why not you as well as Blanche?" cried Alice. "Oh, yes, it will certainly be. He'll approach you like Tirante the White, or Amadis, or some of them; and bending gracefully upon one knee ——."

"I do assure you, if you are so intolerably silly, I shan't sit here any longer. Come, Alice; come, sister; let us walk about; it gets cold in this arbour."

"After you, my Lady Alfreton," said Alice, as they made their exit, chattering and giggling.

Nothing but the apprehension of disgrace,

to which he was exquisitely sensitive, could have kept Lionel concealed till the conclusion of this conference; and when the girls were fairly off, he burst from his hiding place, in a state of such entire disappointment, rage, and distress, as was almost pitiable, though the reward of his mean trick in playing the eves-dropper. All the fond hopes which had gilded his life of late, conferred actual pleasure in their anticipation, and promised infinitely more, were blasted, and irreparably destroyed. He was nearly distracted at the remembrance of his own confident vanity, exasperated to a degree at the ridicule with which he had heard himself mentioned; and, in the first agonies of his mortification, conceived himself the dupe of his pretended friends — the butt and outcast of society in general.

He flung indignantly into his own apartment, where he remained, he didn't well know how long; and was only interrupted from brooding over his dire vexations by the information that the rest had set down to

dinner. Lionel announced himself to be very unwell, and disposed to keep his room; a message which the whole company below were truly concerned to hear: and the instant the meal was over, Hugh left the party, with anxious solicitude, to visit and be useful to his friend.

"And pray tell Lionel, Lord Mondomer, that if he 's really bad, and can't do without one, I shall be ready to sit with him for half an hour any part of the evening," said Edward Alfreton, as Hugh passed him in quitting the hall.

CHAPTER XIII.

On Mondomer's entrance, he found his friend sitting, or rather lying, stretched out in a great deep arm-chair.

He instantly turned his back upon Hugh.

"How is it with you, Lionel? Your indisposition, I assure you, has thrown a damp upon us all."

"I never expected or desired, my lord," replied the other, without looking round, "the sympathy of any one of you; and the mention of yours, I consider as a cruel insult."

"What 's the matter now?" said Mondomer. "I don't understand a word of all this."

"Yes, yes, you do," returned Alfreton; "you understand sincerity, though you are not in the habit of practising it."

"Alfreton!"

"Here I am, my Lord Mondomer," cried

Lionel, rising, and advancing; "here I am, ready to maintain what I have just asserted!"

"Explain yourself a little, if you please," said Hugh.

"I don't know," replied the other, "that I shall choose to explain any thing. I may be betrayed, as I have been, but I will not be trampled upon."

"Betrayed, Alfreton! By whom?"

"The very question is hypocrisy, Lord Mondomer; you well know by whom."

"Now look ye, Lionel," said Mondomer, "I have every reason to believe that you preserved me from some dreadful evil, perhaps saved my life, the night before last. But even if that had not been the case, so truly do I understand you, your infirmities as well as your merits, and so very far are the former overbalanced by the last, that it is utterly impossible for me to feel any sensation, but deep regret indeed, should you take a fancy for behaving unreasonably towards me."

"Your lordship can always talk plausibly," returned Alfreton; "but you have deceived

me, from the first moment of our acquaintance. You took advantage of the openness of my nature, and have circumvented me; and—and—you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"If there were the remotest foundation," replied Hugh, "for what you have just uttered, it would be insupportable: and to induce you to be milder in your language, I assure you, solemnly, that whatever rash or offensive thing you may think fit to say, will be patiently borne by me."

"Ah!" said the other, "it is so easy to be mild and forbearing, when one is happy. I have been ever open as the day towards you, and was told, I should be treated with candour myself."

"I will not affect now," returned Mondomer, "to be ignorant of what has grieved and irritated you, though the source of your information I am as yet unacquainted with. I shall use no protestations, Alfreton; but upon calmer consideration, I have little doubt that you will believe the strict truth of what

I told you formerly as to my situation with respect to the Harlande family. To which I merely add at present, that their arrival at this place was as complete a surprise upon me as it could possibly be to you; and that since the renewal of our intercourse, I have met with no opportunity of communicating to you the unexpected change in my prospects. I had fully determined upon the step, without a particle of reserve, and do certainly reproach myself for not having done it before. I ought undoubtedly to have created such an opportunity, however awkward or inconvenient it might have been."

"I wish you would leave me to myself," replied Lionel.

"Your kind nature is returning," said Hugh; "I see it plainly: do not attempt to check it."

"I am sorry for my intemperate language," said Alfreton, very mournfully, "if that be any satisfaction to you: I am humbled to the dust for it. No wonder you should be pre-

ferred to me; I admit your superiority. I, who am the laughing-stock of the whole company here, and every where else."

" Allow me to say, my dear Lionel, that nothing can be more wrong-headed and erroneous than to talk of preference, applying the term to either of us. There could be no competition. Blanche Harlande and I have been attached to each other from our childhood, I may say; and nothing — nothing — I declare to you, from my heart, connected with the villany that has produced a temporary misunderstanding between us, has afflicted me more, than the being prevented, through those untoward circumstances, from warning you against fixing your affections upon a person already engaged. I shall say no more now; but will leave every thing to your own good sense, and admirable disposition."

Mondomer had not been gone many minutes, when Lionel started from his chair; and, pacing the room with great animation, expressed his thoughts aloud, in the following manner:—

"There is something in that, to be sure; very clear and rational too, as whatever he says always is. If no competition, no mortification of course. Her head was full of him all the time. I'll be hanged if I didn't get positive proof from her own mouth this very day, that she never understood me to be paying my addresses to her. I wish I'd not made myself such an infernal fool just now. Ah! Mondomer won't mind it. He knows well enough what a child I am every now and then; and that, in reality, I like and admire him beyond any one else in the world. And after all now, suppose Mistress Blanche Harlande had not thought proper to approve of me, without any other intervening attachment. Who cares, I should be glad to know! If beauty was all one looked for in a wife, there's no comparison between her and her youngest sister. Hah! by all that's wonderful, can I mistake now? Most certainly, there could be no reasonable doubt, but that my vanity and presumption have met with such a downfal to-day as makes me hesitate as to every thing. The worst

of it is, that pert flippant minx, the Stanley girl, nothing will do forsooth, but she must take it into her impertinent head to prophesy about one. And for that very reason," cried he, mending his pace, as if he was walking for a wager, " I will not be deterred from improving my acquaintance, or making friends, or any thing else that she may approve of, with that sweet bewitching creature, that compound of native elegance, liveliness, and innocence! No; I may endure disappointment less philosophically than some others, and that is defect enough. But to be laughed out of one's happiness, to live a wretched slave to one's perpetual fears of ridicule, is something too contemptible; it is the very quintessence of weakness!"

Which aphorism he repeated all the way down stairs; having by this time determined to rejoin the company, and make his own part good against Alice.

Not without severe visitings of shame and confusion, did Lionel receive universal congratulations upon his improvement in health; and

steadily he declined the offer of dinner, which was repeatedly pressed upon him, declaring, and with the most perfect veracity, that his indisposition had entirely deprived him of appetite: but, by supper time, if he continued equally well through the evening, Alfreton gave hopes that something effective might be done.

Alice Stanley, not having the most distant conception of the real cause of the youth's absenting himself, treated him as an invalid, with something of tenderness and attention; and said more agreeable and flattering things to him than usual. But his ease was not completely re-established till Hugh came forward to shake hands with him in the most perfect cordiality; and thanked him, with a warmth that could not be mistaken, for the exertion he had made in coming below among them.

Two contiguous apartments were lighted up, when they removed from the hall; in one of which music went forward with reasonable perseverance; and the other was the resort of detached parties of stragglers, or those dis-

posed to amuse themselves with chess, draughts, and games of that description. Alice's drawings were put in requisition, and a groupe stood round a table examining them.

"To be sure, I don't remember all that pretty accurately," observed Lord Alfreton; "to be sure, I don't."

"Not you!" said Alice. "Well now; come, what is it meant for?"

"The exact name of the hamlet I won't vouch for, but know the place perfectly well; between Belton Hall and Naworth."

"Admirable!" cried Alice. "That astonishes me, I vow: I did not think my Lord Alfreton was in the habit of observing any thing with such attention."

"We form our opinions pretty readily, sometimes perhaps rashly, madam, in deciding upon the characters of our acquaintance; but I happened to pass the spot more than once, in riding with the ladies of the family."

"And what happened in the course of any one of those rides, Lord Alfreton? do tell me

fairly. I'm positive something memorable must."

"That which struck me most," said Lionel, "was the inimitable horsemanship of Mistress Elinor."

"Oh, it was! Pray, may I ask whether your lordship sustained any loss during that ——?"

Here, however, Elinor pinched her so very hard, as to cut short the remark; and Alice being called away into the other room, Alfreton and the young lady just complimented, were left by themselves.

"What an exquisitely delightful day," said Lionel, "we should have enjoyed, the last time I had the pleasure of being at Belton, but for the intrusion of those tiresome Buttengalls!"

"Dear me, yes," returned Elinor; "and now I think of it, did not your lordship sleep in the yellow chamber?"

"I forget truly. He is any thing but a well-bred person: that pedantic, ostenta-

tious —— Do you recollect how he broke in upon our conversation?"

"So he did, to be sure," said Elinor; "but I do really think your brother went too far: and—and do you know, my lord, by the strangest accident in the world, I happened to find —— that is, it was brought to me; and as I had no means of sending it back to your lordship ——."

"Sending what, Mistress Elinor?"

"Oh dear! I do believe I have it actually about me. Yes, so I have, I protest. Your brooch, that was left in the room at Belton where you last slept. I hope your lordship has not been inconvenienced by remaining so long without it."

"Had I been conscious who was honouring me by taking charge of it," returned Lionel, "my carelessness would have been one continued source of gratification to me, from that hour to the present."

Elinor, excessively surprised, felt her cheek glowing, and knew not which way to look.

"May I beg," continued he; "may I sup-

plicate, as the greatest favour which can be conferred upon me, that you will have the goodness still to retain it in your possession?"

"Bless me, Lord Alfreton—I don't know—it seems very odd—Why should I keep your brooch?"

"Pardon the presumption," said he; "but, for my sake."

If it had been to save her existence, Elinor could have made no intelligible reply. She felt, however, the necessity of saying something; so, with what boldness she might, the young lady raised her eyes, held forth the jewel, and a pretty hammering and stammering would have doubtless ensued; but Lionel was already listening, or pretending to listen, to the music in the next room.

The understanding which Lord Mondomer and the Harlandes were now upon, was no longer attempted to be concealed from any of the party. The general, we have some reason to think, suffered a considerable disappointment; though, from his polished address, and invincible civility, nothing of it became visible.

Indeed, he as well as his sons, were completely thrown out and confounded by the spirits of his niece, which (evidently without any affectation) rose rather than declined, upon this discovery. And Edward Alfreton observed, that, in his life, he never saw a man more improved than Hugh by coming into a large estate, and mixing with the world a little.

"Formerly, I held him to be most intolerably stiff and formal, an uncommon prig, in fact, and never took to him at all: but now," continued he, "I hardly think you'll meet any where a pleasanter ——. Upon my soul, I don't know so pleasant a fellow as Mondomer."

How long the united solicitations of the Stanleys might have detained them all at the general's residence, may be doubtful; had not an event occurred on the sixth of November, which eclipsed the gaiety of high and low, and produced a sincere and universal mourning.

Prince Henry, the hope, the pride, the promise of the nation, was prematurely cut off by the unsearchable decree of Providence; and

an immediate cessation imposed upon every thing in the nature of festivity, among those particularly who, by their rank or office, were held in any estimation at the court.

The Harlandes merely went back to their lodging for a day or two, to arrange matters for their final retreat into the North: and Mondomer, whose grand establishment greatly facilitated their mode of travelling, accompanied them, in the happiest journey they had ever undertaken. Invitation, indeed entreaties, were lavished upon their kind host and his family, for a long and joyous return of this visit in Cumberland, and at Mondomer Castle; and something very much resembling a promise was extracted from Alice, who attempted to joke with the Harlande nymphs at parting, but didn't go through it with her usual spirits.

To repeat Lord Alfreton's assurances of eternal regard for Hugh, and impatience till he could join him at Mondomer, would be quite superfluous. Indeed, for upwards of an hour before breakfast, they were seen walk-

ing together in close and eager conference. Lionel was peculiarly marked; haranguing with such animation that it was manifest he was imparting some intelligence of the utmost importance to one or other of them ; and by the extreme surprise at first, and subsequent visible delight of Hugh, the nature of the communication may probably be guessed.

After Mondomer and the Harlandes had departed, and as Lionel was pensively taking a turn in the meadow near the river, 'till his attendants should be ready, Alice Stanley overtook, and thus accosted him :—

"Will you allow me, Lord Alfreton, to ask you one question?"

Lionel bowed.

"I need hardly mention it, however," said she. "Has your friend told you of—— what has passed here within these few last days?"

"Of every single circumstance, Mistress Stanley, without the minutest reservation."

"Well, then," said the lady, "you are used to my impertinence; but I must take the liberty to say, I am glad you look—you

seem — so well pleased and satisfied with the arrangement. This is no jest — it really gives me pleasure to observe it — it does, I protest to you."

"You are very good," said Alfreton, "and I hope, by this time, convinced that certain conjectures of yours, which you have often hinted to me, were solely the offspring of your own misapprehension."

"You mean to say, then," returned Alice, "that you have never been vexed, annoyed, and out of countenance, at the mention of Belton, and so forth?"

"I never said that: don't invent, and misrepresent me. All I insist upon is, your total and most inconceivable mistake between the daughters. Oh, Mistress Alice! with your reputation for penetrating faculties, I should, indeed, have expected a far more acute observation."

She looked archly upon him, biting her lips to control some inclination or other, but said nothing.

"I have so frequently undergone your ridi-

cule, fair lady," continued Alfreton, " that I now defy it, and, what is more, with my usual frankness, I shall make no scruple to confess to you, that if your object was to tease me with sound, real effect, about the Harlande girls, you should have alluded to one of the others rather than the eldest, though I am not going to tell you which."

(Geoffrey Stanley now called to them from a distance, and made signs that the horses had come round).

" I am overjoyed to hear your candid confession, my lord — positively in raptures! my obligations to your lordship are beyond all imagination!" cried Alice, laughing 'till she was ready to drop upon the grass. Then holding out her hand to him, as they approached the house, " Farewell, my Lord Alfreton, I give you vast credit for that attempt — it was pretty fairly executed, and, by many degrees, the boldest I have ever yet known."

CHAPTER XIV.

While our friends are occupied in their return to Cumberland, it will be necessary for us to look somewhat more closely than we have hitherto done, into the history of one Forman, who has been mentioned so frequently in the course of this narrative. That personage, as is apt to be the case, took many years to render himself the dreadful and atrocious sinner that, in the progress of this work, we have been obliged to describe him. He became known upon the Continent in the vigour of his youth, and traversed in different situations, real or ostensible, the greater portion of Europe. Sometimes he acted in a military, oftener in a civil employment. For the spirit of enterprise, (though, when his interests peculiarly required it, he could make sufficient exertions of courage), was not al-

together natural to him: whereas in fraud, finesse, intrigue, and every species of deception, he showed an abundant and never-failing capacity. Such indeed was his ability, address, or power of insinuation, that on a variety of occasions, he seemed on the very point of establishing himself in posts of great wealth, rank, and authority, which were invariably lost in the end, by some discovery of his perverted heart and crooked practices. These disappointments operated bitterly upon the wilful grasping temper of this man, and brought on a fit of serious illness, while he was in disgrace at the court where he then resided, to meet the expenses of which he had scarce any means remaining. To add to these calamities, a domestic, or subordinate partner in iniquity, the only one who remained in attendance upon him, abandoned his wretched principal in the hour of need, after robbing him of apparel, a few jewels, and the little money he had left. Unhappily for Forman, his constitution enabled him to struggle through these accumulated miseries, and, when suffi-

ciently recovered, to leave the mean and obscure dwelling where he had been confined: he walked sullenly out of the town, and ruminated, in the adjoining fields, upon his present hopeless condition, and former magnificent expectations, in as bad a state of mind as it is possible to conceive — desperate — covetous — ambitious beyond other mortals — and for ever disappointed.

Goaded by his own thoughts, he proceeded, with agitated but unequal pace, farther and farther from the habitations of man, talking to himself perpetually, and occasionally raving aloud. In the midst of these paroxysms, he heard on a sudden, with the mingled sensation of anger, shame, and trepidation, natural on such occasions, a footstep close behind him, and turning with a start, perceived a tall man of very remarkable and commanding appearance, and sumptuously attired, insomuch as to excite Forman's wonder, considering where they had met.

The stranger joined him with a confident air, and continued to walk by his side.

"I am acquainted with all your distresses," said he; "and come hither to relieve them."

"Who are you?" cried Forman, in accents of disgust and vexation: "and why do you fasten yourself upon me?"

"One who has the power to perform what he promises."

"Pass on, sir: I am ill-disposed for this intrusion. You are troublesome. Pass on: you know me not."

"Oh, grievous error!" said the stranger. "Full well have I long known thee; and my power of looking into thy heart is deeper far than even thine own."

They walked forward a few paces, Forman irresolute how he should conduct himself; and during that short interval the stranger made some communication, at which his companion grew pale, and trembled; his teeth chattered in his head, his eyes appeared ready to burst from their sockets, and he leant upon his staff, for his limbs must have failed him had he attempted to move on."

"Few words," said the seducer, "are ne-

cessary to a man of your strength of mind and soaring faculties. Those faculties have been denied the success in this world that they had a right to demand. Thy complaints are just. I hold the dominion over this globe; and 'tis I who make thee the offer of redress. What dost thou desire?"

After a long pause, during which Forman earnestly contemplated the being before him, and seemed working himself up to desperation—

"Power!" said he, with a firm voice.

"Meet me here again on the morrow!" said the stranger, at the same time gently laying his finger upon the forehead of him whom he was addressing.

Forman shrunk from the touch, which, cold as the grave, seemed at once to penetrate to his brain; and, for an instant, his eyesight departed from him entirely. When it returned, he stood alone on the dismal heath; and the whole occurrence might have passed for a dream but for the sensation which still actuated the part where the stranger had touched him.

On his way back to the town, from an icy chill, his forehead glowed suddenly, with throbbing, violent, and unintermitted heat, which lasted through the night, and prevented him from enjoying one moment of repose. To add that the wicked and rebellious Forman kept his appointment on the following day would be needless; though we are unable to recount every thing that passed at his second interview with the tempter.

It is said, indeed, that at the blasphemous words he uttered, the evil spirit shouted triumphantly; that Forman trampled upon the cross, and renounced his baptism: that, when required so to do, he even fell down and worshipped! Be all that as it may, he unquestionably became from that moment possessed of horrible secrets unknown to the rest of his species. The extent of these abominable endowments cannot with precision be stated. During the remainder of his days upon earth, many of the ordinary infirmities of mankind appeared certainly to produce no effect upon this wretch. In very old age, he

exerted occasionally a greater degree of strength and bodily activity, than at the most vigorous period of his life; while at other times, his entire faculties, mental and bodily, seemed to fail him at once; and frequently when he had most need for their exertion.

That, however, which had been promised to him—"worldly power"—he did not obtain. The same overruling hand that had ever baffled his schemes of iniquity, when ripe for enjoyment, still continued to defeat the sorcerer's own designs, however frightfully and unhappily extended might be his capacity of injuring others. In the course of these efforts, ever restless, ever fruitless to accomplish the ends for which he had bartered his soul, he visited England under the name of Forman, which we have chosen to describe him by; but which was one only out of many appellations which he had in different emergencies found it necessary to assume. There, either from previous knowledge, or quick observation of her character, he discovered a fit associate in the haughty, violent, and dissatisfied widow

of the Baron de Lyle. Once convinced of his really infernal power, that ill-fated woman gave readily into the black and fatal alliance; and for a tolerably long period, great was their ostensible success. The weaknesses of mankind, from the monarch on the throne to the poor illiterate serving man, afforded them a continual and abundant harvest. The baroness, exalted to a splendour and influence, which, in her days of greatest prosperity, she had never before known, perpetually fed the wizard's hopes of grandeur and authority on his part. The guilty loves of the minion Rochester, and Frances, Countess of Essex, if not originally instigated by the Lady de Lyle's contrivances, were beyond doubt encouraged and brought to maturity by her dark and selfish arts, till those young persons became inextricably lost, and involved in the labyrinth of sin and misery; and moved upon the stage of this world, the puppets, the machinery, of that evil woman. Having chosen their career deliberately, rejected the comforter of the human race, and openly rebelled against

his authority, it might have been expected, perhaps, that these partners in perdition should at least have carried on their projects unfettered by the obstructions of conscience.

That, however, (to their rage and eternal confusion) was far from being the case.

They suffered, at times, grievously, insupportably — aye, even pitiably, from the stings of remorse for what they had already perpetrated, and the anticipation of final ruin; neither did they by any means dare to seize upon every advantage that lay apparently within their grasp.

The solicitations, the arguments, the taunts, and invectives of the sorcerer were invariably thrown away upon the baroness, when the former would have induced her to practise upon her late brother's life, as a step towards her enjoyment of his vast possessions. And even subsequently to his natural death, she had long resisted the dark designs of Forman against her nephew.

Though with an inconsistency, the utter miserable weakness of which she constantly

acknowledged, bewailed, and fretted at, this perverted character laboured, by every base art and stratagem, to cross the young man in his designs of marriage; as if, in the natural course of things, she could reasonably expect to outlive a youth of his age. With this despicable plan in her thoughts, the Lady de Lyle applied to Forman for assistance; and though cursing her folly and irresolution at every step of the way, the wizard himself (very much to her astonishment) was induced to be the bearer of a letter, calculated to aid her projects, to Sir Giles Harlande.

Forman employed himself, during the one only evening that he passed at Belton House, while engaged in this mission; in making observations upon the characters and habits of the family, with an assiduity that could scarcely have been expected from him. Perceiving the young people, and Hugh Mondomer, (with whose person he had previously made himself acquainted) walking and conversing together, consulting, as the villain naturally imagined, upon the effect of the

Lady de Lyle's communication to the father, he waited till they approached a situation suitable to his intentions, and then, under favour of a wood, (though on the point repeatedly of detection) Forman overheard a narrative, of which he well knew how to make the most to the baroness; and which was duly repeated afterwards, with every malicious and aggravating circumstance superadded, to his confederate. Indeed he came back from Cumberland in a temper more than usually disturbed, morose, and gloomy.

Having been visited, during his stay in Sir Giles Harlande's neighbourhood, with such intolerable despondency and horror of mind, that, as he told the baroness, he actually thought hell had commenced with him.

Nor was the wizard's return immediate: his accustomed sly and prying disposition led him to continue lurking for several days in those parts; in the course of one of which, a suitable opportunity occurred to him, as he fancied, of terrifying Blanche Harlande into a renunciation of young Mondomer, bound by

an oath, the most solemn, awful, and terrific, that he could invent and impose upon her. How that attempt was interrupted, and totally frustrated, has already been described.

The diabolical spells and incantations, which, in his dismal retreat near Lambeth, were so frequently resorted to about this time, to the discomfort and consternation of all in the vicinity, excited at last a hue and cry, which rendered his further sojourn there extremely precarious, to say the least of it; and the necromancer soon perceived that disguise and flight were not to be delayed one moment longer. Now, well knowing, from various sources of information, the possibility, the ease indeed, of making a dupe of the open-hearted and simple Sir Giles Harlande, Forman misled and cheated him by an assumption of the fictitious name of Vavasore, and a tissue of other falsehoods, which his experienced invention had ever at command. By such devices, the sorcerer procured a temporary retreat, under creditable and sufficient protection, where he remained unmolested,

(though by no means unsuspected) till the dreadful night of the twenty-ninth of September.

After that time, the country people disdained to keep any further measures of forbearance with the detested intruder: they shunned him when few or single, and in numbers, hissed, hooted, and reviled him. At length they came to open violence, invaded his seclusion, and would unquestionably have grossly ill-used him personally, or, it is very probable, have even put him to death; but the caitiff contrived to conceal himself from the first torrent of their wrath; and how his constant and kind benefactor, Sir Giles Harlande, accelerated his escape, we have already seen.

During the period of his sojourn near Lannercost Abbey, by different subtle contrivances, a correspondence with many of his dupes and associates was with difficulty kept on foot. The Lady Essex, before whose childish impatience every thing was always to give way, had been reduced even, through a

strange hand, and most unsuspicious agent, (no less than the thorough-paced English country-gentleman, Sir George Stanley) to send this Vavasore, or whatever he might call himself, an intimation, by signal, that the unhallowed meeting, which afterwards took place at the end of the month of September, was finally agreed upon. The prime confederate, indeed, of this atrocious offender, the Lady de Lyle that is to say, had absolutely been concealed at his house for many days together, about the time of her brother's death; and from thence thought fit to gratify her rancour by transmitting to her nephew an obscure, alarming, and under the circumstances, afflicting letter upon that event; and which Vavasore had delivered at Mondomer Castle on the morning of the funeral. This woman had contracted an absolute detestation towards Blanche Harlande, as well for being the object of young Mondomer's affections, as because the former had made some discovery of her own evil habits. She seized, therefore, with pleasure, an opportunity that presented itself

of alarming and insulting Blanche; and having Forman stationed at hand, she attempted either so to actuate her by her fears, as to extort the same sort of solemn vow that the wizard himself had formerly attempted to terrify her into compliance with; or we very much fear, this wicked and malignant person would have been little scrupulous as to what means they used, or lengths they proceeded to.

Her abettor, however, and great instructor in evil, after repairing, at her desire, to the spot, suddenly, perversely, and, to the baroness, most unaccountably, refused to move a finger in the transaction, and even insisted upon the dismissal of the girl unhurt. Not that it was of any mighty importance to the Baroness de Lyle, to have added the young lady's promise against any renewal of the intercourse between Lord Mondomer and herself, to the other measures which they had before taken upon that subject, and the certainty of interrupting, not to say destroying, their engagement, which the conspirators seemed then in actual possession of. But it is the nature of guilt to

pant for ever-increasing and unreasonable security. While Hugh Mondomer was resident in London with his uncle, this witch and her devilish ally together, had, by every species of the basest arts, by gratifying the man's avarice, exciting his covetous desires, and working upon his imagination, by the instrumentality of both hope and fear, corrupted the mind (never a very strong one) of that young person, Stone, Hugh's only attendant while the late Lord Mondomer was living. In repeated instances, they induced this weak and profligate instrument of theirs to grieve and betray his master, whom he nevertheless really loved; and in none more cruelly than when he had the heart to suppress Hugh's letter sent from Mondomer Castle to Belton, to be delivered to Blanche herself, and repaired with it to Vavasore's detested abode, after witnessing the deep distress occasioned by his perfidy.

At length these unrelenting sinners absolutely terrified the poor wretch into the measure of leaving one of the most prosperous and promising situations that a man in his condi-

tion could possibly be blessed with, and persuaded him to desert to them altogether, where he was rewarded for his treason and misdeeds by such a life of hardship, despair, barbarous usage, and horror, first with one (for the sorcerer employed him in the dread night of the twenty-ninth), and then the other of the confederates, though he never made a part of the regular, ostensible household of the baroness; as in the end absolutely turned the unhappy creature's brain, and drove him, in desperation, to that attempt upon his own life, which, it may be remembered, Lord Mondomer had the opportunity of preventing. Now it so happened, that in a yet stronger degree than the woman hated Blanche, did the wizard detest and abominate Hugh Mondomer; and with all the determination and perseverance belonging to his violent and deadly disposition, he resolved upon that young man's destruction, not more to satiate his cupidity, through the means of the Lady de Lyle, (in that event a magnificent heiress,) than to gratify his own revenge. In advancing the nefarious projects

of the confederacy, Forman had obtruded himself upon the Earl of Essex, and worked upon the latter, by his accustomed arts and subtlety, to obtain his consent to, and, indeed, active assistance in their measures, with regard to that nobleman's wife; and upon the failure of those intrigues, the villain would actually have attempted to impair, by drugs, the reason of him under whose roof he was then residing — but for timely detection. His flight from the earl's seat, and still more narrow escape when recognised by him and his followers in Derbyshire, we are already acquainted with. Upon that occasion, in the agony of his endeavours to outstrip his pursuers, he suddenly confronted young Mondomer in a narrow path; and even then, pressed and in danger as he was, the wizard knew him, and being resolved to make the most of the occurrence, drove at Hugh's heart with a confident and murderous aim. Unused to be foiled by mankind, Forman was nevertheless in this encounter gashed, maimed, and, without the smallest success on his own part, left

by this youth bleeding and helpless upon the ground; from whence also he would speedily have been delivered over to the arm of justice; but during Mondomer's temporary absence, the wretched tool — the misguided creature, Stone, who had accidentally remained behind at the beginning of the conflict, was terrified nearly out of his senses at abruptly beholding the dreaded countenance of the sorcerer, and lost no time in favouring his escape. The last deed of darkness which these prime agents of the grand deceiver of the human race had made up their minds to engage in, Forman was the readier enabled to procure the Lady de Lyle's consent to, from the utter downfal of her fortunes, and her personal danger of a horrid and ignominious execution. Rochester and his paramour had, for some time, felt uneasy under her sway, to which forbidden indulgences, and the perpetual gratification of their mutual presumption and vanity, had, nevertheless, failed to reconcile them. In fact, they had both long dreaded and abominated her; and after the horrible, yet abortive

proceedings at Lannercost, in the autumn, they determined to rebel against her influence, which resistance, as they perfectly well knew, could only be made effective by her destruction. Now, though the undaunted audacity of this woman cowed even her enemies for a time, they proved ultimately too strong for her; and some words thrown out by the king, when she last ventured to the court, convinced her that no time was to be lost. Her final attempt, in conjunction with the necromancer, upon the life of her own brother's child, they committed upon little other temptation than the insanity of despair, and, among other things, their mutual envy and detestation of Hugh Mondomer's unbending religious principle.

Though Forman, it must be admitted, never failed to flatter himself, that by the mighty succession which would devolve upon the baroness, their failures in this world might yet be retrieved.

This concluding act of a long course of iniquity, was perpetrated at their original

haunt, but, before its fatal termination, providentially dispelled, as we have seen, by the conduct of young Lord Alfreton; and the miserable slaves to Satan who had partaken of it, were now roaming vagabonds upon the face of the land, cursing each other — cursing the hour that ever brought them into existence — cursing the whole state of the creation.

CHAPTER XV.

It was approaching to the middle of the month of November when Lord Mondomer and the Harlandes, after travelling down to the North in one continued state of love, joy, and content; now engaged in rational conversation; and now, with innocent hearts and exuberant spirits, deriving amusement and diversion from every thing they heard and every thing they saw — from their very inconveniences even — which, to say the truth, did not amount to any thing extremely formidable, arrived safely at Belton. Where, except for the difference of the season, Hugh found things much as he had left them in the preceding June, and slept there one night before he went over to Mondomer on business which required his presence.

During that first evening, Hart, the butler, imparted to the family a certain document that

he had laid his hands upon while they were away, in the course of a thorough search and rummage which he instituted at the old tenement called Friars' Close, where Vavasore had lately resided. Nothing less, this discovery turned out to be, than the very individual letter with which Stone had been charged for Blanche Harlande, at the time when his excuses and lies gave to that damsel and her father such astonishment, distress, and indignation. All the party observed, that this additional proof of Hugh's honour and fidelity could by no means be wanting, and Mondomer thereupon was about to throw it into the fire.

"No, no! give it to me," said Blanche; "the letter is mine, after all: I am delighted to receive it even thus late, rather than not at all. Give it to me, Hugh; 'tis my property, and I shall preserve it."

Mondomer was on horseback next morning before the sun had completely risen, and anxious to settle his affairs and return, arrived at the castle at an early hour in the forenoon.

There he found an epistle from a former acquaintance, which had been sent on the preceding day by a special messenger, and was dated from Jedburg, in the adjoining kingdom. It contained the following communication:—

"My dear Lord Mondomer,

"We seem destined to meet in the heart of strange adventures: do you remember our evening in Derbyshire together? I have long wished to renew that—may I say friendship? and am now not only about to pay you a visit at your own residence, if suitable to your lordship, but shall likewise take the liberty of introducing a gentleman of great merit and talent; who, by the way, as I understand, (for he has favoured me rather liberally with his conversation since we have been travelling in company,) is not totally unknown to you; one Richard Maltravers, of notorious fame. Your lordship is probably aware of my late mission to Edinburgh, on the part of his Majesty; at the conclusion of which, I had orders to bring up some of the crown jewels to Westminster. Now, the worthy person, it seems, whom I have at present in custody, had a fancy for relieving me of some part of this charge; in the indulgence of which whim, he ventured, at the head of really

a respectable body of followers, (in point of numbers at least,) to attack our escort between Lauder and Eisilton. Success, my Lord Mondomer, does by no means constantly attend desert; we proved too much for him — his forces were utterly routed, and the gallant commander himself was traced to the town from whence I now write; where (oh, Scottish caprice, false-heartedness, and ingratitude!) a lady resided, of great beauty and accomplishments, to whom, as it turns out, this distinguished character had not only surrendered his heart, but sundry other articles of much greater value to her, upon different occasions. This northern Dalilah, under the circumstances of reverse and extreme inconvenience in which her lover then presented himself, has deemed it consistent with prudence to betray him into our hands; and my present object is to see him safely delivered over into the custody of the sheriff of Northumberland. Whether your lordship be in the North just now, I know not; but shall make bold, at a venture, to halt at Mondomer Castle, in my way to Newcastle, within forty hours, or thereabout, as I guess, from the present moment. So no more, but remain

"Your lordship's true servitor till death,

"Essex."

After issuing necessary orders for the reception of the earl and his train, Mondomer went out on foot to call at the Vicarage; and, being in haste, he took a short cut over the side of the intervening hill, through a narrow track, amid a thick wood of beech, firs, and hardy trees of that description. Almost immediately upon his entering the plantation, a noise among the shrubs attracted his attention.

He cast his eyes carelessly towards the side from whence the sound proceeded, but without much heeding it, and saw, at some distance off, a man scrambling from him, who soon disappeared entirely. Hugh concluded it to be some village lad disturbed in the midst of his depredations, stealing wood, or doing any other slight mischief of that sort, and proceeded without further notice. He had nearly gained the open down on the other side, when a pale, haggard, ill-favoured figure, presented himself full in the path.

They stood staring directly at each other, and Mondomer felt persuaded he had seen the

same object somewhere before, though he was unable exactly to call to mind where.

"You are the Lord Mondomer, I believe?"

Hugh assented.

"You are well met, my lord. I was on my way to the castle. You see before you a person of whom you have doubtless heard in this part of the country: you see an injured, a grossly injured, and persecuted man; who sues for justice and protection, and has a right to require them! My name, Lord Mondomer, is Vavasore; and I claim the privilege of ——!"

"The same person," said Mondomer, quickly, "who lately resided near Naworth?"

"The same."

"Then I inform you, sir, without hesitation, that I hold it my duty to arrest you in the king's name!" cried Hugh, clapping his hand to his sword.

"For what offence?"

"Upon a charge from which I heartily hope you will be able to exculpate yourself.

But your late very questionable conduct by Sir Giles Harlande, and sudden desertion of him, have determined me on this measure. In the mean-time, sir, you must assuredly return with me."

"Your manner is short and peremptory, my lord," replied the other: "I am a man of established family, and feel indignity, perhaps, as acutely as any of the Mondomer line; but habituated to misfortune, I know how to control my wounded pride. A fair investigation of my life and actions, carried on with personal safety from the insane prejudices of the rabble, is all I demand; is all I came hither to claim. I follow you, my lord, and yield myself your prisoner!"

Mondomer then led the way back towards the mansion, looking over his shoulder at first, to see that the other was so near as to preclude all chance of an escape. But observing the readiness with which the man kept up, and recollecting that of free will Vavasore had presented himself, and announced his intention

of surrendering to some authority competent to inquire into the circumstances of his situation, Hugh now walked forward freely, contented with ascertaining, from the sound of his footsteps, that the other was at hand.

On a sudden, the report of fire-arms close upon them resounded through the wood; and Mondomer, turning about instantly, perceived Vavasore, with a drawn dagger in his hand, stagger, and fall at his feet!

"Aha!" cried a wretched, half naked object, who sprang into the path at that instant, and hung over the fallen stranger with countenance of malignant triumph; "Aha! is it even so? Cheer up, Master Forman!"

Hugh looked aghast at the mention of that dreadful name.

"What!" continued the other, "has the poor, stupid, ignorant lad, been too hard for thee then? The dull and loathsome brute, the off-scowering of sin, the lowest, basest slave o' darkness! I remember all thy pretty names for me, full well do I! And must thee starve

and beat me too, after destroying my precious soul! Oh! shame upon ye!—shame upon ye!"

The wounded man uttered no cry or sound of any description; but lay upon his front, grinding his face into the very earth as it were, and with his hands tearing up the turf.

Mondomer now seized the assassin.

"Sane or raving, this deed must be answered for," said he.

"Oh, Sir Hugh! Sir Hugh! wasn't it thee, my good honoured young master, as blessed my life for many a year; and didn't I cheat, vex, and ruin thee, if I could, in return for it? Ah! young gentleman! things ha' gone bad with me. But I warned thee, though; didn't I? And well knowed I this devil's designs; and long have I watched him lurking in these bye places. Why, he were even now aiming a blow at your neck; and, in two moments more ——. Ha! ha! ha!" pointing to Forman, "then the paltry fool and dolt has been too cunning for thee at last!"

Footsteps were now heard approaching, to

which Mondomer and the other turned their attention; and almost immediately Simcox the vicar and Hannacott, then in their way from the parsonage to the castle, appeared upon the spot. They stared with astonishment and consternation upon the scene before them.

"Ask me no questions," said Hugh, abruptly, "but help to convey this wounded person to the castle. I will take care of the other wretch!"

"Why, 'tis Stone, I vow! 'Tis Ned, by all that 's sacred!" cried one after the other.

"I know that full well," replied Hugh; "but we have no time to spare!"

They raised the sufferer between them, whose appearance had become, almost beyond conception, shocking. His pallid and ghastly visage was convulsed; the mouth, twisted frightfully towards one side of his face, remained open and covered with foam; while his fierce and fiery eyes were fixed earnestly, but without intelligence, upon the party

around. In this condition he was brought within the mansion, and put to bed instantly; and while medical assistance was sent for with all possible expedition, Simcox, who for the benefit of his parishioners had acquainted himself, to a certain degree, with the treatment of common surgical cases, attended this deplorable and utterly hopeless being. Lord Mondomer, agitated almost to illness at the discovery of Vavasore's identity with the necromancer Forman, and justly fearing what he might disclose, gave strict orders that none should be permitted to enter the apartment where the wounded man was lodged, the two excepted who had assisted in conveying him to it. Hugh took the first opportunity of informing Hannacott of the person's real and formidable appellation whom they had in their custody; and, in an adjoining chamber, was consulting with the former upon the steps necessary to be taken, when Simcox rushed in with every symptom of horror, declaring, that the dying man had uttered such words as perplexed him grievously, and had absolutely

so shocked him, that he felt unequal to remain with the other alone. Even now he doubted what he had heard, suspected it might be the work of his own inflamed and terrified imagination, and begged Lord Mondomer to return with him immediately. They found the wizard sitting upright in the bed, talking to himself with the utmost rapidity, and no cessation. He noticed not their entrance.

"Do you consider him in instant danger?" said Hugh.

"I have examined the wound," returned Simcox; "to extract the ball is impossible; it must have passed close to the heart: and depend upon it, he cannot, in the course of nature, last many minutes. See! see! — oh, may the Lord above have pity upon thee!"

The agonies (of mind principally) with which this miserable creature was now seized, are infinitely beyond our powers of description. His shrieks, it is said, were heard for several miles off. The crowd of peasantry assembled in the court below, upon the first rumour of these strange events, fled from the castle in terror

and dismay; and the women in the village fell upon their knees, and pressed their babes instinctively to the bosom.

At once, all was still again.

"Simcox!" said the sufferer, "Jonathan Simcox! did'st thou ever look upon me before?"

"Hear him now," whispered the clergyman, pressing Lord Mondomer's hand.

"You are a priest; draw near, and answer me this. If the devil has deluded me throughout, is our compact still to stand good? If the conditions have been broken for which I made over to him my eternal soul, is my perdition certain, nevertheless?"

"Resist, if possible," said Simcox, "his present temptations; restrain your desperate thoughts."

"Can it really be that I am going to die!" cried the man, with a dreadful yell. "Oh, no! no! 'tis impossible! What, death! actual death! before I have yet enjoyed what was promised me!"

"I should feel myself inexcusable," returned the minister, "were I to give hopes of ——."

"Ha! say you so!" cried the other; "then send for my brother, I must speak with him."

Here Simcox again grasped Mondomer's arm.

"Why do you look so reproachfully upon me, young man?" to Mondomer. "Her career was of her own free choice, entirely; and you I could never harm; my power was fettered. Send for my brother, I say! Day after day have I watched him, when he knew not that the destroyer was at hand. What evil have I inflicted upon him, or his smiling innocent children? I tell thee, priest, 'tis false! Fiend as I am, that charge is false as ——! Will you not bring him to me this once? once only, before we part for ever and ever! Before the lost and accursed Mervyn goes to his final doom! Then I must seek him myself;" with which words he started, by an astonishing and unexpected effort, from his bed, and dashed at the window; but exhausted nature sunk under

the exertion, and before they could lay hands upon him, he had dropped dead upon the floor.

Without a single remark the three persons in attendance replaced the body in the bed, and stood for many minutes, now regarding the corpse, and now each other, rapt in horror and utter amazement.

The noise that pervaded the castle at this moment was totally unheard by them, and the Lord Essex had not only dismounted in the court, but absolutely forced his way into their apartment, before Mondomer knew of his arrival. Hugh attempted, but without effect, to stop him.

"I entreat your pardon, my lord," said the earl; "but all sorts of tales have reached me from the time we entered the village. By Heaven, 'tis the same! 'tis the wizard himself! 'tis the monster Forman, as I live and breathe!"

This exclamation, which was heard by many of the domestics, conveyed to them, however, very little additional information. From the

ramblings of the unhappy Stone, it was already a matter of notoriety that the sorcerer Vavasore, who a few weeks ago had alarmed all that region of the North, lay wounded and dying in the most awful state of despair.

A message was at this time brought to the Lord Essex, that his prisoner earnestly requested to look at the body, and implored that he might be allowed to come in among them, if it were only for one moment. This none of the rest heard, and the earl himself seemed totally inattentive to it, but acquiesced as if mechanically.

"Does your lordship say then that Forman was the only name by which this miserable being was ever distinguished?" said Moudomer; "because words have fallen from him of a strange and incomprehensible import."

"Most undoubtedly not," said a new voice, but one not unfamiliar to Hugh's ear, as the prisoner entered the chamber pinioned, and his guards fell back without the door, when they had ushered him in; "let me view the body. Aye, aye, 'tis just as I imagined, faith.

You may perhaps recollect, my Lord Mondomer, I had the honour of informing you, somewhere or other in one of the midland counties, that I was possessed of a momentous secret affecting Sir Giles Harlande. You would not believe me; but most certain it is, that his younger brother, Mervyn, now lies before you, with his account closed. A pretty distressing one, I am inclined to suspect!"

"No ribaldry, sir," said Mondomer, looking gravely upon him, and with a countenance that implied more than suspicion as to the truth of his report.

Simcox however observed, "All this is astonishing truly: and yet it cannot be; for, to my positive knowledge, Sir Giles received a circumstantial detail of Mervyn's death, with a ring at the same time belonging to the family, which his brother had constantly worn, from ——"

"The humble individual who now addresses you," replied Maltravers: "when I left him in the Netherlands, I solemnly protest to you I thought he would infallibly die;—I thought he

must. And in that case, you know, he could have no necessity for some few little articles, which were of use to a survivor. I did not therefore contradict any account of his death that might happen to be put about; and when Sir Giles found me out to make the inquiry, in prudence it was worth while to give up the ring you mention, which clenched the report neatly and satisfactorily."

"That is to say, you robbed and deserted your confederate in roguery when he lay at the point of death!" observed Lord Essex.

"Your lordship is pleased to put it so," returned the brigand; "but I don't quite like the term confederate. I would have you to know, my lord, that I had never any thing to say to his dark dealings out of this world. You comprehend. Though I saw the worthy gentleman, often did I, and knew him well; and, as far as my own affairs would admit of it, accurately did I trace his goings on."

The curiosity of Simcox could not resist a further question.

"Was he, this man Mervyn, was he con-

nected at any time with a gang of outlaws, or desperadoes of that description, in Scotland?"

"Was he not?" replied the robber.

"You may have heard," returned the minister, "of one Bertha Meere, a poor abandoned creature."

"Look ye, sir," returned Maltravers, "I have a great respect for the cloth, but it doesn't follow that I am to consume the whole afternoon in answering your reverence's questions. Excuse me, but I shall say no more."

The events of the day, as might be expected, engrossed all their thoughts and discourse through the remainder of the afternoon. Master Simcox was prevailed on to stay supper, in order to relieve Hugh from the sole duty of entertaining the Earl of Essex, which he did not feel himself peculiarly fit for.

"Nay, why so low and thoughtful, my lord," said the earl, towards the close of the evening; "one would have supposed, that instead of the world being delivered from the

devil's most effective agent, you had lost some valuable friend of your own."

"I am excessively uneasy, I confess," replied Hugh, "with regard to Sir Giles Harlande. What effect these tidings may produce upon him, and how we are to break the matter, one is utterly at a loss to conceive."

"Where 's the necessity," cried Lord Essex, "of breaking it to him at all?"

"True, my lord," said Simcox; "I was just thinking so."

"How many," observed Mondomer, after some moments of consideration, "were present at that man's last moments?"

"None but ourselves and Hannacott," said the parson, "with the addition of my Lord of Essex, to hear that malefactor's subsequent story."

"For myself," said the earl, "I have no acquaintance whatever with the gentleman you are anxious about; and I give you my word of honour, the secret shall remain for me, as if it had never been divulged. As to the redoubt-

able Maltravers, his mouth will soon be stopped, it is probable; and yet it almost goes against one, to consign him to the fangs of justice; the rogue keeps such a heart upon things, and is at times so inexpressibly droll. I do assure you, gentlemen, it was as much as I could do to preserve my requisite dignity and gravity on our march."

"Take care he doesn't give you the slip yet, my lord," said Hugh.

"To tell you the truth," returned the earl, "if I once deliver him over (for which I now stand pledged) at Newcastle, there might be many events that would afflict me more, than to hear of his subsequent escape. The rascal gave us such histories of his lighter pranks and adventures; how he tricked one of your fraternity, sir," to Simcox, "out of a fine blood horse, early in the autumn; I think he said somewhere near Longtown, in the adjoining county; and such an infinity of exploits of the same amusing nature."

"But surely, my lord," said the minister,

"it is grievous to see any person in his unfortunate condition so totally thoughtless."

"Faith," replied Lord Essex, "I ought to be of the same opinion, I suppose, but fear I shall have no apposite lecture ready for him to-morrow."

Between five and six next morning, after a hasty breakfast, the Earl of Essex, with his train and captive, were in progress towards Newcastle; and a long consultation ensued between Lord Mondomer, the vicar, and Hannacott, in which it was at length resolved, that immediate information should be given at Belton of the death of Vavasore, and his identity with Forman the wizard; a name by this time universally known, and already a by-word and term of general reproach.

But most scrupulously did they resolve to suppress every thing that had transpired since the death of the miscreant; trusting that, through their caution and discretion, Sir Giles might be spared a pang, which (utterly unexpected as it was) would probably have embit-

tered the remainder of his days. What to do with the wretched maniac, Stone, Hugh seemed unresolved upon. But old Hannacott shook his head, and hoped he might not have concealed some deadly drug or other about him: for we omitted to state, that the surgeon, or whatever he styled himself, of a neighbouring village, had (since his arrival too late to pay any attention to the sorcerer) seen Stone, and found much reason to suspect that he was injured by poison. Orders were given, at the execution of which Lord Mondomer himself was anxiously present, to supply the afflicted creature with every possible relief and comfort. But he still lay senseless, breathing with the utmost difficulty, and in a completely hopeless condition, when Hugh consigned him to the care of his trust-worthy steward, and set off in the afternoon for Belton.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHILE these extraordinary transactions took place in the North, the Earl and Countess of Nantwich had returned to England; and making no stay in the metropolis, on account of the general mourning, repaired forthwith to their seat in Cheshire, accompanied by their eldest son and daughters. The peer and his lady, as we rather think has been hinted somewhere before, were an exceedingly ill-assorted couple. When young, he had been perpetually and inordinately jealous; for which, indeed, he is said not to have been entirely without grounds, as his countess was, to its utmost, what has in all periods been termed, a gay lady. And since such causes of uneasiness had become obviously ridiculous, the earl seemed to think (if one might judge from his practice) that he had a full right to revenge himself for all the vexations he had formerly undergone.

This amiable purpose was atchieved by crossing continually the vanity of his wife, which happened to be tenderly susceptible upon all points, as we believe, without exception. During their foreign expedition, they had squabbled, if possible, more than usual; and on the very first evening after their return to Gray'burne Castle, his lordship, forced upon a tête-à-tête with his wife, thought fit to observe, that the marriage of his eldest son was an event, in his judgment, extremely to be wished; insomuch that, (well knowing the humoursome and impracticable habits of the youth) he should actually be glad to see Lionel united to any gentlewoman of good family. This position, as a matter of course, was attacked by the countess, who, from her son Edward, had been apprized of Lionel's passion for Blanche Harlande some time ago.

The debate grew warm: bitter things were said of every one of the children, in proportion to the preference which each supposed the other to have for the particular child abused:

and the Harlandes were introduced into the discussion by name.

"This Sir —— something," said the lady, "may be an honest man in his way; which I take to be of the bettermost sort of farmers: but it was reserved for me this evening to hear his daughter mentioned as an eligible match for the Earl of Nantwich's heir apparent."

"I have never said so, madam," replied the peer, who, if he had been let alone, was very much of the same mind with his lady, "or any thing like it. But what we might think desirable in connexion, it is fifty to one but that capricious young man, not much benefited by your example, and utterly spoiled by your weak and foolish fondness, might —"

"I spoil the children, Lord Nantwich! I a bad example! and weak too! Of all the low, dirty, false, and venomous aspersions ——"

However, we feel there is no occasion to carry on this controversy any further. It will be sufficient to mention, that a mutual inclination, often alluded to, was at this time

freely avowed; and the earl and countess, before Lord Alfreton and his sisters returned to the room, had decided upon parting; and that with as little delay as could be contrived. Of course they remained impenetrably sulky till bed-time, neither speaking a word to their children or each other.

Next day Lionel was closeted by his father, informed of the approaching separation, and peremptorily forbidden to say one word in discouragement of the step.

"Where tempers are incompatible with family harmony, Alfreton, the head of that family is the sole judge of the measures to be pursued. Nor will you, perhaps, have to regret, that the absurd pride and positiveness of your mother have not in all respects been yielded to by me. They tell me, Lionel, that you have contracted a liking for the daughter of one Sir —— Harlande, a gentleman, I am well aware, of respectability and established name, in — Durham, I think."

"What, sir?" cried the youth, blushing and stammering. "I positively, sir — this

is such a surprise — I don't know.—— No, not Durham, sir, — Cumberland; not far from your own estate."

"Oh, Cumberland! Well; as far as I could bring myself to listen to the inundation of nonsense, prejudice, and conceit, uttered last night, I collect, that you have thought proper (very wrong, Lionel, without consulting me) to pay attention to this gentleman's eldest daughter."

"Who gave your lordship that information," said young Alfreton, "I am not disposed to guess: but whoever it might be, they have fallen into a very considerable error. It is not the eldest; but, on the contrary, the youngest of the three, for whom I certainly must, and do avow those feelings — those — Oh, my dear sir, if there be such a thing as lively, innocent, and animated beauty in nature; if the pure and ingenuous heart depicted upon the countenance——"

"I have no time for all this," said the earl; "but my desire is certainly to see you comfortably (if not greatly) married before

I die. I mean, therefore, to inquire into the condition of this Cumberland family; and if the report be not unfavourable, I shall possibly have no disposition, Lionel, to cross any notions of happiness which you may have formed."

This was beyond Alfreton's utmost hopes, who had been consulting with his sister ever since their arrival in Cheshire, how the matter could be even alluded to. And as his impatience to start for Belton scarcely exceeded that of his father to vex and mortify his wife, the inquiries respecting the Harlandes proved mere matter of form. As far as they went they were satisfactory; and on Lionel's quitting Gray'burne, the peer, though he declined writing, sent a civil message to Sir Giles, which the son much amplified in the delivery.

The arrival of Lord Alfreton at Belton was an event by no means confidently calculated upon, though Hugh, both to Blanche and her father, had repeatedly talked over the hopes and intentions of his friend; and from

the mind of Elinor the last evening at the Stanleys' had never since been absent for three minutes together. When, however, it was announced that he was then absolutely within the house, and in serious conference with Sir Giles, the young lady was seized with such a fit of timidity, that Lionel, whose distrust of his own powers of pleasing was now as great as had been his former confidence, felt no little alarm, doubt, and uneasiness.

At length Blanche having almost by force dragged down Elinor from her own chamber, and represented to her that nothing could be so childish as not to give her lover a fair hearing, Alfreton and the nymph were left in the square green room by themselves.

After what he thought a suitable time, Sir Giles proceeded to pay them a visit; but the apartment was empty; and it turned out, that the young people had so far recovered from their mutual embarrassment, as to venture upon a long walk together; from which they returned upon a most excellent understanding, each having made a prodigious dis-

covery of perfections in the other within the last hour, which had not even been guessed at before. When Alfreton made his offer to Elinor, it wanted but a very few days of Christmas, full three weeks having elapsed between the explanation which we have just glanced at, and the dismal events at Mondomer, connected with the death of Mervyn Harlande.

That interval had been marked by an occurrence of a somewhat similar description at Belton. A blow, from which scarce any of the party had recovered their habitual state of spirits when Alfreton arrived; and Mondomer, above all, was still deeply affected by it. The latter, however, entered heart and soul into his friend's felicity; and having listened to all Lionel had to say, 'till his raptures were in some degree allayed, Hugh, in his turn, took that opportunity of acquainting the other with what astonished, shocked, and completely confounded him; expelling, for the moment, the idea of courtship, and every thing else.

It seems that Hugh returned from Northumberland on the first of December; and within four days afterwards, the two eldest girls set out for a walk immediately after their dinner.

Mondomer was, as usual, to have accompanied them; but Sir Giles having something to say about the repairing of one of his farms, laid violent hands upon, and detained the youth to consult him thereon.

"How rapid," said Blanche, when they were at some distance from home, "have been the changes in my prospects and situation, since the terrible alarm I suffered up at that desolate barn yonder!"

"Will it be too much for you to climb the hill?" observed Margaret: "I have never seen the spot since."

"I feel a sort of dread of it, I confess. Do you really wish it, Margaret? However, 'tis absurd to give way to such fancies: very well, let us."

They soon mastered the hill.

"Ah, Sawken's barn!" said Margaret.

"Nothing puts me more in mind of the days of our childhood, than a walk to this point. It was always the grand feat to be performed, if we could persuade the nurses to come on so far. And so you actually found the sister of the late Lord ——"

"Stop," cried Blanche, holding the other; "I believe we had better go back."

"Nonsense!" said Margaret: "what are you afraid of?"

"Aye," resumed the eldest, after some pause, "it was nonsensical, I believe, in truth."

"Did you think you saw any thing, Blanche?"

"'Twas natural I should fancy so."

"Well, then, let me go in first: my dear girl, do let me move. What's the matter with you?" cried Margaret, breaking away, and entering the ruin, where she stood as if transformed to a statue. This Blanche perceived; and as the dread of imagination is apt to be more painful than any reality, she rushed forward to join her sister.

A woman, clad in rich, but soiled and torn habiliments, sat upon a large stone within the hovel, her face covered with her hands. The two girls, unable to utter, remained with their eyes rivetted upon this spectacle. The female then looking up, they both recognised the Lady de Lyle, and Blanche leant upon her sister, or she must have sunk to the ground.

"I saw you coming," said the baroness, in a still quiet voice, "and might have spared myself this last shame and disgrace. But I feel them not. Be not terrified, Blanche Harlande: I have no design against you *now*: my race is run."

"Alas, madam," cried Margaret, for Blanche was scarce in possession of her senses, "we are grieved, sadly grieved to see you in this state."

"It will probably not be lasting," resumed the lady, "whatever the change may produce. You, Blanche, have known me best: did you ever see me shed a tear?"

Blanche sobbed, and lifted her hands, as if in prayer.

"You remember the splendour that surrounded me: you remember how the ambitious and aspiring bowed down before me. There is now no cabin upon the face of the earth — no hovel, no mere ruinous shed like this even, that I can call my own; and this is the third day since I have tasted food."

The sisters wept as if their hearts were breaking.

"Oh, come with us, madam!" they cried: come back with us; my father will relieve you, and we will all pray for you, and never, never betray you ——."

"The woman Catherine you knew also," continued the lady; "who has grown affluent through some one's everlasting perdition: she too has forsaken me: she would have sold me to my enemies. But I complain not. Who is it that I have forsaken?"

They again, in an agony of affliction, besought her to return with them to their home.

"Detain me not! pity me not!" said she; "I am in my way to another kingdom."

"To Scotland?" cried Margaret.

But without an answer, the unhappy woman rose, and, with her accustomed commanding gait, descended the hill in the opposite direction to Belton Hall, and was soon beyond their sight.

When the girls could collect their thoughts, it was resolved to go home instantly and communicate this shocking intelligence. The first thing that struck them on entering their father's hall was a groupe of servants at the door, who clearly, by their whisperings and gestures, manifested that some matter of uncommon interest was going forward within: and they shortly after saw Lord Mondomer and Hart talking earnestly to Blanche's maid, Rose Brenfield. The latter was in tears, pale as ashes, and showing every symptom of horror and distress.

"I tell thee, Master Joseph," said the girl, with vehemence, "that I did then, as plain as I see you and his lordship this moment. D'ye think I wanted to frighten myself to death?"

"This is unfortunate," observed Hugh, on perceiving the two sisters approach.

"My dear girls," with a look of extreme perplexity, "let me entreat you to go up to Elinor."

"What's the matter with poor Rose?" cried Blanche, who had a regard for the girl.

"Nothing, ma'am; nothing in the world," returned the butler; "the child seems to have been frightened by some accident."

"I beg leave to be told, without any disguise, what has thrown her into this agitated condition," replied the young lady.

"Speak, Rose," said Margaret.

"As I shall have my sins to answer for hereafter, my lady, I assure ye, upon my faith, upon all my hope to be forgiven, that this is as certain as truth itself. The Lady de Lyle, my lord's relation there, has just walked into the chamber, not five minutes since, where — where my master thought fit to put that man, that Vavasore, as they called him. Oh, dear heart! dear heart! she passed me so solemn, so woeful-like in the gallery; and when I went in after her, not a living soul in the room, and yet no other door that any body could possibly

have got out by. Oh, me! what will happen to us all! my dear, dear young ladies!"

Hugh's observation was now attracted by Blanche, whose expression of countenance became very particular, though she spoke not a word.

" 'Tis an impossibility, Rose," cried Margaret, with uncommon warmth; " my sister and I know it to be impossible. How did you suppose her to be dressed?"

" All sad and faded, my lady; and her robe was tore from one end to t'other. And, oh, the face of her! Angels protect us! I might ha' known from the very first 'twere no living woman. All wet she seemed: her hair daggled and streaming; and her garments heavy with the water."

Here the child put herself into such a taking, that she could no further proceed with her tale. Blanche, having made up her mind by this time, drew Mondomer aside, and with the aid of her sister, told him briefly, but firmly, those circumstances, which, at the commencement of the seventeenth century, it

may well be imagined, gave to the girl's appalling vision the character of an undoubted, fatal, and portentous communication. Hugh said little in reply; but taking Hart with him, hastened off in the direction pointed out by Blanche.

Before they reached the hill, however, a crowd of the peasants was seen approaching; and it soon became evident that certain among them were carrying a female figure in their arms. Mondomer, overwhelmed with the certainty of impending evil, rushed from them, and returned to Belton without speaking to a soul.

Joseph advanced, and met the party: he well knew the corpse; it was already cold and stiff. The mob all talked at once: but Joseph had occasion to ask very few questions.

"The lady were unlucky," said one of the villagers, "to fall in just thereabouts; for there's only that one pit deep enough to ha' drowned her for miles and miles. What a dismal mischance it be!"

"Aye," cried another; "but my Cicely

says it be no mischance at all; for she see the lady walk as quiet up and down ——"

"Hold thee thy nonsensical tongue, can't the foolish fellow," said Hart. "Say no more, and bring the body on to the hall."

How Mondomer sustained the confirmation of his forebodings, the degree in which Sir Giles and the others were overcome by it, and with what privacy the funeral was conducted, we have never thought it necessary to inquire.

CHAPTER XVII.

A FORTNIGHT at the least had now passed away since these shocking and deplorable scenes. Mondomer, though his spirits were by means restored to their usual tone, derived continual and increasing comfort from the good sense, tenderness, and affection of his beloved Blanche; not to mention that the presence of Alfreton greatly contributed to divert his melancholy. And to aid the rest of the party in banishing fruitless gloom, and the terrors of imagination, Alice Stanley, with her brother, the baronet, and cousin James, made their appearance at the hall, early in the afternoon of Christmas-eve. The reception of visitors at Belton had ever been a cordial one; but on this occasion, their guests were positively in danger of being devoured. Alice, after having exhausted her congratulations, and more serious observations and inquiries, lost no time in resorting to her favourite re-

creation of laughing at Lord Alfreton, and much oftener to his face than otherwise. Though it must be added, that she took occasion, before long, to wish him joy, and, indeed, to express her confident expectations of his future happiness, with a heartiness of sincerity that could not possibly be doubted. She found both the lovers, Hugh and Lionel, in some degree of discomposure; for Sir Giles (most likely to show his sturdiness and independence, as his future sons-in-law were both men of high rank,) issued a decree, absolutely forbidding Elinor's nuptials till she had attained the age of seventeen, which would not be till the fourth of the following February; adding, that the others might just as well wait till then likewise; as they could fill up the intermediate time so very happily and pleasantly, either at Belton or Mondomer Castle.

"And we'll all on us go over," said he, "in a fine jovial party, and show it to Mistress Alice, who thinks it be the finest place in all Europe. Hey, Blanche! thee'll join us this time, I trow."

The festivities of the following day went far, indeed, in reconciling the whole company assembled, to the crosses of this life, both little and great, or, at least, in totally dispelling the thoughts of them for the time.

The service of the church was, in the first place, attended with pure and fervent devotion, Jonathan Simcox having come over in time to do the duty, and brought his dame with him; and thanksgivings were returned, in the gratitude of their hearts, for the many great and unexpected blessings with which, by a merciful dispensation, the afflicting circumstances of their lives had been ever graciously succeeded.

And here we cannot forbear to mention the inestimable importance that it proved to Lord Alfreton, to have married into a connexion of such confirmed and steady religious principles.

An excellently disposed young man he had ever shown himself, a firm believer, and zealous in all duty to the extent of his knowledge. But his education in that most essential respect, had been, vastly inferior to his friend, Mon-

domer's; and the examples set him in his own family were not particularly edifying.

Without riot and intemperance, this day of 'glad tidings' enlivened the hearts of masters, domestics, tenants, and peasantry, for many and many a mile along the Northern Border. No dwelling perhaps overflowed with felicity like Belton House; but all were merry and cheerful.

At the conclusion of their own Christmas dinner, the old knight made an incursion into the servants' hall, accompanied by his whole happy train. There Blanche was much pleased to perceive Rose Brinfield's colour and liveliness returned, as the girl chattered and laughed in the midst of mummers and morice dancers, with Robin Hood, Friar Tuck, the Maid Marion, and numberless more of the worthies who are apt to figure away in these ancient and rustic diversions. Meanwhile the strong beer flowed liberally around, the minced pies and plum porridge were abundant, and a forest of holly, misletoe, and various other evergreens, almost incommoded the dancers.

" Many a festive Christmas," said Elinor, with something approaching to a sigh, " have we kept at Belton; but the last is, beyond all comparison, the noblest, as it ought to be."

" And why the last, my sweet Elinor?" returned Lionel. " Do you know, I think these old interesting customs and pastimes so much more appropriately kept up in the North here, than I have ever been in the habit of meeting with them any where else, that I heartily hope we shall never spend our Christmas in any other part of the kingdom."

She gave him her hand with a smile of gratitude and delight, as they tripped away to look at some other group of merry-makers.

The leading personages in these transactions having been thus provided for, we are not aware that any remain, respecting whose fate much solicitude can be entertained.

Nobody, we imagine, cares what became of Nortonborough.

The short and iniquitous career of Rochester and his paramour, and their most just and adequate punishment, in being condemned to

wear out many years of disgrace, misery, and obscurity, hourly tormented by each other's society, is a matter of history.

The outlaw, Maltravers, only escaped the due meed of his abandoned life, by the infection of a fever that prevailed in the gaol to which he was consigned at Newcastle, and of which he died the very day before he was to have been brought out to trial. One Lipscombe, however, who had been subsequently apprehended on the charge of being concerned with Maltravers in the late attack upon Lord Essex, and many other offences besides, some of them capital, was made a proper and public example of.

Whether Alice Stanley ever changed her condition, (she certainly did not espouse Edward Alfreton,) there seems some doubt. Richly did she deserve a comfortable and happy state, and, whether married or single, enjoyed a plentiful fortune, a friendly and easy disposition, and the love and regard of all that were intimately acquainted with her. Of her brother, Sir George, though, we happen to be

possessed of more accurate information; he had always determined to marry the instant he was turned of thirty; and being no swain, and extremely liking the connexion, which was now a distinguished one undoubtedly, he made his proposals for Margaret Harlande to her father, acquainting the knight, that he was apprehensive of impeding, rather than forwarding his suit, if he had trusted to his own courtship. The old gentleman sent for Margaret, and in his usual luminous manner, opened the business, giving her to understand that considerable as the fortune of the baronet might be, he (Sir Giles) never meant to force her inclinations in the remotest degree. The knight added, that though not over sharp sighted in these affairs, he saw clearly enough the difference between Sir George Stanley and the men whom her sisters had married; that the former was just a common character, given up very much to hunting, hawking, and sports of that stamp, and he therefore hoped, that if she really felt herself unable to return a suitable degree of affection —— But Margaret

stopped him short just at this point, declaring that Sir George was no more unlike her sisters' husbands than she herself was unlike her sisters in many respects.

"They may be," said the young lady, "and, I dare say, are, very superior geniuses; but I never could reach their flights for half an hour together; nor do I, I must confess, wish for a husband who 's to be something totally different from the generality of mankind. I readily leave this business, father, to your pleasure and judgment, but must say that I feel obliged to Sir George — very highly so — for his good opinion of me. As to field-diversions, I never recollect the time when my dearest, dearest, father didn't appear to like them as much, at least, as any of our neighbours and friends; so I have no particular prejudice against them.

"Faith, I believe ye're right, lass, a'ter all," returned the knight: "never pretend to whims and high-flown notions, as ben't nat'ral to thee; and take my word for't, that when people come together, and don't expect too much as

to transports, and raptures, and that, from this here world — nor overmuch from each other into the bargain; they go on — (that is, if they be right-headed and well-disposed folks, my dear girl) — in that case, Margaret, they go on tolerable well."

THE END.

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And seldom has she known a friend like thee."

Thomson's Autumn, line 948.

" The infidel Lord Bolingbroke honours the Lord President of Scotland with this censure, ' that he was indeed a man of capacity, good sense, and knowledge, but was in a delirium when he wrote against Tindal.' "

Leland's View of Deistical Writers, vol. 2. *page* 153.

Also, for a high character of this Author and his writings, see *Quarterly Review*, No. 28, Jan. 1816.

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